# ARNE

AND

# THE FISHER LASSIE.

By BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON.

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORSE

*WITH AN INTRODUCTION*

BY

WALTER LOW.

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# BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION.

THE author of "Arne" and "The Fisher Lassie" has essayed well-nigh every kind of literary composition —the short story, the prose idyl, the novel, the lyric, the epic drama, the stage-play; he has been for many years past a prominent figure in Scandinavian politics and has had a great share in all the social, educational, and economical movements that have been going on in his country for the last thirty years or more:[1] prose-writer, poet, politician, reformer, philosopher, it is only in the first character that we have to do with him here: nevertheless, a brief statement of the principal events in the life of a man of whom it has been well said that he is equally "national leader and national bard, and so thoroughly Norse that to mention his name is to unfurl the flag of Norway" should not be without interest.

Some three-score years ago, the pious and stout-hearted Lutheran pastor of Kvikne had a little son born to him. The pastorate of Kvikne lies in a wild rough district of the Dovre Mountains, and the people were wild and rough

[1] The biographical details in the following pages are chiefly taken from Björnson's story of "Blakken," and from a Swedish sketch of Björnson's life and works, by "L. B.," published by Bonnier, of Stockholm.

as the land they dwelt in; for many years there had been no pastor there before Björnson's father went among them, and that was perhaps why (says Björnson himself in his "Blakken," a tale of his childhood) he got the post—"for men trusted him to manage a boat in a storm." The parsonage, half-way up the mountain, was a lonely, desolate spot: winter reached it so early, and tarried so late, that the new-mown hay in autumn-time, and tender young crop in spring alike stood in danger of burial beneath the snow. The good pastor (though himself a hardy mountain-born native of those parts) must often needs wear a mask to protect his face from being frost-bitten, as he journeyed to outlying districts of his large cure, though perhaps he did not carry pistols with him into the church as his predecessor had done, to guard against human foes. The little boy (as he tells us in "Blakken") would often sit on the table and look down into the dale, looking longingly at the lads sliding along on their skates over the frozen river in the winter, or in summer playing merrily in the fields; no human playmates came to him so far up the mountains, so he made friends of Blakken the horse, of the little dog "who taught me to steal sugar," and of a cat who one day suddenly walked into the kitchen and so frightened him (for he had never seen a cat before) that he rushed to his parents "pale as a corpse, crying out that a great mouse had walked up from the cellar." There was the pig, too, to whom the little boy gave a silver spoon, to teach him to eat properly, which resulted in the pig's endeavouring to eat his food with a spoon in one sense, certainly. Pig, dog, and cat followed the little boy about in his rambles, and helped him to "kill time well enough, more especially as we all four often took a nap together." Two other of Björnson's early reminiscences of his first home may find place here before we bid adieu to the good pastor. His son relates how a certain swaggering bully

sought out the priest on his arrival at Kvikne, "to teach him the ways of the people." However, he found, to his great dismay, that the "parson" meant to teach him his own way first. The village champion found himself hurled neck and crop out of the pastor's study, whence he came tumbling down the stairs: he picked himself up with all speed, and rushed away from the parsonage. Somewhat later, when the Storthing instituted a sort of "school board" system in Norway, the pastor was the only member of the newly-elected body in Kvikne who was bold enough to attend the meeting convened for the purpose of dividing the parish into school districts, etc. His wife begged him not to go, for the parishioners, who thought that "the parson made the law," had gathered together to mob him and prevent him from executing it. Nevertheless, he went, and made out the chart and registers "alone and unaided," according to the best of his ability, among volleys of threats from the crowd; but when he walked out again, with the documents under his arm, they made way for him, and no man touched him. You can imagine my mother's joy, when she saw him come driving home again, quiet and earnest as ever." Such was Björnson's father.

When the little boy was six years old, his father received the living of Næsset, in Romsdal, a lovely valley on the west coast of Norway. It lies in the middle of such scenery as Gunlaug in "The Fisher Lassie" was born and lived in, and which Björnson loves to describe again and again. He has given us a beautiful picture of his physical and spiritual surroundings here in his poem to his father, in which the reader can hardly fail to be struck by the likeness between Signe's gentle, diligent mother (in "The Fisher Lassie") and his own. From Næsset he was sent, when twelve years old, to the grammar school at Molde, where, however, "he did not make much progress, and

there were serious thoughts of sending him to sea, as unfit for books." However, in due time he went to the University of Christiania, but there he gained no academic distinction. He had already began to write verses and to contribute to the newspapers, when, in 1856, at Upsala, "he for the first time arrived at a clear understanding of his call to poetry." It was immediately after this that he went to Copenhagen, where he stayed a year, and wrote his first masterpiece "Synnöve Solbakken," which appeared in 1857, and was followed next year by "Arne."

"Folkslif-noveller," "Dorf-Novellen." "Village Novels" is the name given to this class of writing; but, like many other names, it can hardly be of any use save for catalogue purposes. "Novels" they can scarcely be called, in the sense that we use the word in England, and "village" novels they certainly are not, if by that is meant that they have any affinity with the works of Auerbach in Germany, or the widely different productions of Mr. Hardy in England. Björnson's "village novels" are pictures drawn by a poet (who uses the prose form to express his thoughts) of the life among dwellers in forest, fjord, or valley. His "plots" (especially in "Arne," "Synnöve," "A Happy Lad," etc.) are of the slightest kind, perhaps because he gives us an artistic picture of life, instead of a series of "realistic" photographs. Nor has he chosen to fetter his imagination by preaching any particular set of views, or his artistic faculties by constant analysis of the motives of his characters; sometimes, when he thinks fit, his creations (*e.g.* Arne) are introspective as Hamlet himself, at others naïve (*e.g.* Margit) as Dr. Primrose. His "moral" and his "purpose" (I do not speak here of his later productions) you must find out for yourself, if you think it worth while; even if one feeling concerning the earthly rewards and punishments of the good and evil men do here seems to some to permeate all

his earlier writings, yet Björnson never fashions his work to make it square with his theory: rather, the theory appears to be the natural deduction from the things he has seen and lets us see. "The Fisher Lassie" (which with "Arne" makes up the present volume) belongs to a few years later date (1868) than "Arne," but the above remarks apply to it as well. It is, however, somewhat more complicated in its plot, and ambitious in its aim; but the poetical, unornate style, the manly simplicity of expression, the purity of treatment, is the same in each. In these two (as in all his prose work) the lyric strain is ever present, often breaking out in actual metrical form; while his power of drawing a "dramatic situation" will not be denied by those who call to mind the death of Nils in "Arne," or the theatre scene in "The Fisher Lassie," when Petra finds out "the greatest calling on earth."

It is necessary to put a limit to this preface, so I shall content myself with a bare enumeration of his works. His "Folkslivnoveller" have for the most part been mentioned, viz., "Synnöve," "Arne," "A Happy Boy," and "The Fisher Lassie." We add to these a number of short stories ("Blakken," "Thrond," "The Father," "A Perilous Wooing," etc.), and two later novels, "Captain Manzana" (an Italian story) and "Magnhild," a work scarcely worthy of its author. His play-writing (he has on two occasions directed a theatre) began with "Valborg," which he wrote in his student days, and sent to the manager of a theatre for representation. It was accepted, but before it was put on the stage the author grew dissatisfied with it and destroyed it. "Between the Battles," "King Sverre," and "Sigurd Stemlse" have become national dramas, while a poetical comedy, "The Honeymoon" ("Dr. Nygifte") is one of his most successful pieces. To understand his later works it is necessary to enter into his life

as a liberal agitator, as well as the change that has come over his views of religion. That we shall not do here: we shall content ourselves with quoting the remark of the writer in an American review, who tells us that Björnson "began to own the responsibility to the larger life about him in "The Bankrupt," "The Editor," "The King," "The Glove," etc. His more recent works, in consequence, deal with "problems," "the same law for the woman and the man," "miracles"—which last, however, serve as a foundation for one of his most poetical plays, "Beyond Man's Powers" ("Over Ævne"),—"heredity," etc. He is praised for his "frankness" (by the authority quoted above) in his later works, and for his studies in the problem of heredity, &c. (in "Flags in the Town and the Haven"); but though all his works are notable—nearly all *great* —there are some who think that his earlier works (regarded as literature, not as implements of social reform or studies in scientific morality) far surpass those of his riper years. "Come back again, dear Björnson, come back, and welcome shall you ever be among us," wrote "one of many"[1] at the time (1879) when the great writer had cast aside his old religious belief, and betaken himself to new paths. Many there are who must wish he would "come back" to his older ways of writing.

Of my work as translator in making this version, little need be said: I have endeavoured to always faithfully render Björnson's *meaning*, and trust that I have for the most part succeeded. The delicate beauty of Björnson's style would, of course, be far less evident in any translation than in the original,—at any rate, I am sufficiently aware of my own inability to preserve it, and this remark applies naturally with still greater force to the songs and snatches

[1] In "Oplandenes Avis:" quoted by "L. B." *ut supra.*

of song throughout the volume. For the more successful versions of some of the verses in "Arne" (viz. "The Little Lamb," "The Parish and the Wood," "The Sunshiny Day," "The Wonderful Song," etc.) I am indebted to my wife.

W. L.

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# ARNE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### PROLOGUE.

THERE was a deep ravine between two of the mountains: through it a full-flowing stream rushed heavily down over boulder and crag. High was the bank on each hand, and rocky, so that one side stood barren and naked; but close to it, and so near the stream that in spring and autumn it shook its spray upon them, were green patches of forest-growth, looking up and around, and finding room to throw out their arms neither here nor there.

"What if we were to clothe the ravine-side?" said the Juniper one day to the stranger Oak, that stood nearer to her than all the others. The Oak looked down, to see who it was that spoke; then looked up again—and held his peace. The stream worked so mightily that its waters were foamy-white; the North wind dashed into the ravine, and roared amid the rocky rifts; the bare mountain hung sadly over it, shivering in the cold.

"What if we were to clothe the ravine-side?" said the Juniper to the Fir on the other side of her. "If anyone's

to do it, it may well be we," said the Fir; he grasped his shaggy beard, and looked across at the Birch.

"What do you think?" he said.

The Birch looked warily up at the rocky wall: so heavy it lay above her, that she scarce felt able to draw breath.

"In God's name let us clothe it," said the Birch, and there was none other to help than these three, so they took it upon themselves to clothe the ravine-side.

The Juniper led the way.

When they had gone a little bit of the distance, they met the Heather. The Juniper was about to go by. "No, let's take the Heather, too," said the Fir. So the Heather went with them.

Before long the Juniper began to slip. "Catch hold of me," said the Heather. Juniper did so, and where there was only a tiny crevice the Heather put in one finger, and where the Heather once put a finger in, there the Juniper worked in her whole hand. On they clambered upward, the Fir slowly following them, and the Birch labouring after. "But it's God's own work," said the Birch.

Now the Ravine began to ponder what sort of live creatures it could be that were clawing and creeping up her. When she had thought over it for a couple of hundred years or so, she sent down a little streamlet to have a look. It was in the spring-flood days, and the brook slipped on and on till it came to the Heather.

"Heather, dear Heather, can't you let me by?—I am so little!" said the Streamlet.

The Heather was very busy; she just raised her head and went on with her work again. Under her darted the Streamlet, and out and on again.

"Juniper, dear Juniper, can't you let me by?—I am so little!"

The Juniper gave her a scrutinizing glance; but as the

Heather had let her by, she couldn't be doing much harm if she did the same, she thought. On darted the Streamlet, on and down again, till she came to where the Fir stood, gasping for breath, on the steep hill-side.

"Fir-tree, dear Fir-tree, can't you let me by?—I'm so little!" said the Streamlet, and she kissed his foot, and behaved so humbly, yet daintily, that he felt quite abashed, and made way.

But the Birch drew aside of her own accord, before ever the streamlet asked.

"Hi, hi, hi!" laughed the Streamlet, growing bigger and bigger.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Streamlet, still growing. "Ho, ho, ho!" as she grew greater still, and hurled Heather and Juniper, and Fir and Birch flat on their faces and their backs, up and down the craggy boulders. The Ravine sat pondering many a hundred year whether it had not made her smile that day.

It was clear enough: the Ravine did not wish to be clothed. The Heather was so much put out that she turned quite green again, and then went on. "Pluck up your heart!" said the Heather. Juniper had got half up to look at the Heather, and went on getting up for so long that at last she was quite upright. She ran her hand through her hair, set out again on her way, and bit so fast hold of the crags that she thought the Ravine could not help being aware of it. "If you won't hold me, I'll hold you, at any rate!" was what she meant. The Fir bent his toes a bit, to see if they were still sound; raised himself on one foot, and found it all right; raised himself on the other, which was unhurt, too; and then stood up on both. He looked round him to see—firstly, where he had been; secondly, where he had fallen; and thirdly, whither he was to go. Then he began to jog along again, and behaved as if he had never tumbled down in his life. The Birch had made

herself very dirty in her fall, but she got up and brushed off the earth. And now on they went again, growing more and more, right up over the side, in sunshine and in rain.

"What's all this about now?" said the Ravine, when the summer sun rose above them, the dew-drops glittered on them, the birds sang, the wood-mouse piped, the hare frisked hither and thither, and the ermine hid himself with a shrill cry.

Then came the day when the Heather got one eye over the edge of the ravine. "Oh! how lovely, how lovely, how lovely!" she cried, and on she dashed.

"Dear me!" said Juniper, "what can it be that Heather sees?" and she pushed on till she too could peep over. "Oh! how beautiful!" burst from her, and she, too, sped on. "What's up with Juniper to-day, I wonder?" said the Fir, making long, quick strides beneath the summer sun. Presently he stretched up on his toes and peeped over. "Oh, how glorious!" he cried, all his leaves and prickles standing on end with amazement; he struggled up over the ledge, got a firm footing, and was off after the other two.

"What can it be they all see there that I can't?" quoth the Birch, lifting her skirts well up, and tripping after them. She got her whole head above the ledge all at once.

"Oh, look, look!—if there's not a great wood of Firs and Heather, and Juniper and Birches upon the common there waiting for us!" cried the Birch, shaking her leaves in the sunlight till the dew-drops trickled sparkling off.

"Yes," said Juniper, "that's what comes of persevering!"

## CHAPTER II.

### KAMPEN.

IT was up at Kampen that Arne was born. His mother was Margit, the only child at the little farm among the crags. When she was eighteen, she stopped too long at a dance one evening; her friends had gone off without her, so Margit thought the way home would be just as long for her, whether she waited till the end of the dance or no. Thus it came about that Margit remained sitting there till Nils Skrædder,[1] the fiddler, suddenly laid aside his instrument, as was his wont when he had had more than enough to drink, left the dancers to hum their own tune, took hold of the prettiest girl he could find, and letting his feet keep as good time to the dance as music to a song, jerked off with the heel of his boot the hat of the tallest man in the room. "Ho!" laughed he.

As Margit walked home that night, the moon was making wondrous sport over the snow. When she got to the loft where she slept, she could not help looking out at it again. Taking off her bodice, she stood with it in her hand; she felt that she was getting cold, so she quickly took off her things and dived far down beneath the coverlet. That night Margit dreamed of a great red cow that had got into their field. She strove to drive it out,

[1] *i.e.* tailor.

but, try as she might, she could not stir from the spot. The cow stood there quietly eating, getting fatter and fuller, and every now and again looking up at her with great heavy eyes.

Next time there was a dance in the parish Margit was there. She did not care much to dance that evening; she sat listening to the music, and it seemed strange to her that others did not want to do so too. But when the playing ceased the fiddler rose, and wanted to have a dance. He went straight across to Margit Kampen. She was scarcely aware of anything, but she was dancing with Nils Skrædder!

Before long the weather grew warmer, and there was no more dancing that spring. Margit was so taken up with a little lamb of theirs that had fallen ill, that her mother thought she was going almost too far.

"It's only a lamb, after all," she said.

"Yes," replied Margit, "but it's in pain."

It was long since she had been to church; she had rather her mother went, she said, and one of them must stop at home. One Sunday, however, when the summer was getting on, the weather was so fine that the mother thought the hay might well be left out for another day and night, and so they could both go. Margit had nothing much to say against it, so she put on her things; but when they got within hearing of the church bells she burst into tears. The mother turned pale as death. They went on, the mother in advance, Margit following; they listened to the sermon, joined in the hymns, heard the prayers out, and waited for the bells to peal out the end of worship before they got up to go. But when they were in the room at home again, her mother threw both her arms round her.

"Hide nothing from me, my child!" she cried.

Winter came again, but Margit danced no more. Nils Skrædder went on playing, drank more than formerly, and

wound up each party by dancing with the prettiest girl there. It was now said for certain that he could get whichever he wished of the daughters of the richest farmers in the place; some even added that Eli Böen herself had offered him the hand of her daughter Birgit, who was sick for love of him.

But just about this time it was that a child of the cotter's daughter at Kampen was brought to be christened. It was given the name of Arne, and its father was said to be Nils Skrædder.

The evening of that day Nils was at a great wedding feast: there he drank all he could. He would not play, but was dancing the whole time, and could scarcely endure any one else being on the floor. But when he came to Birgit Böen and asked for a dance, she refused. He gave a short laugh, turned on his heel, and took hold of the first best girl at hand. She, too, held back. He looked down at her—a little, dark creature, who had sat looking intently at him; she was now quite pale. He bent lightly over her and whispered:

"Won't you dance with *me*, Karen?"

She did not answer; he repeated his question. Then she replied, whispering as he had done:

"The dance might go further than I should like."

He drew slowly back till he got to the middle of the floor, then he gave a sudden spring, and danced the "Halling" alone. No one else danced: all stood silently looking on.

Then he went into the barn, laid himself down, and wept.

Margit sat at home with the little boy. She heard about Nils, and how he went from dance to dance; she looked at the child and wept, looked at him again and was glad at heart. The first thing she taught the boy to say was "Papa," but she dared not do so when the mother—

or rather grandmother, as she was henceforth called—was anywhere near. The consequence of this was that it was the grandmother whom the boy called "Papa." It cost Margit much trouble to teach him not to do so, and this helped to make him sharp and quick at a very early age. He was not very long before he learnt that Nils Skrædder was his father, and as he was then at an age when all that is out of the common is attractive, he soon got to know what sort of man Nils Skrædder was. The grandmother had strictly forbidden Nils ever being mentioned; her great aim in life was to get her little Kampen made into a regular farm, so that her daughter and her daughter's son might be secure. She took advantage of the landlord's poverty to buy the ground, and every year she paid off a portion of the money, working like a man, for she had been a widow now for fourteen years. Kampen was big, and grew bigger, so that now it supported four cows and sixteen sheep, besides having half share in a horse.

Nils Skrædder, meanwhile, was still going about the parish; his business was not so profitable now as it used to be, partly because he took less trouble about it, and partly because he was not so well liked as of old. He devoted himself all the more to playing the fiddle, and this was often the occasion of his giving himself up to drink, which led him into quarrels and stormy days. There were some who heard him complain of his lot.

Arne might have been about six years old when he was one winter's day playing at sailors on his bed: he had put up the white counterpane for a sail, and sat steering with a ladle. His grandmother was sitting spinning, busy with her own thoughts. Every now and then she would nod her head, as if to hold fast the thing she was thinking of. Then the boy knew that she was taking no notice of him, so he began to sing, just as he had heard it, a song about Nils Skrædder, coarse and low as it was:

"If you've chanced but a day's length among us to dwell,
You have surely of Nils, our brave tailor, heard tell.

"If it's more than a day you've been here in our town,
Then of course you know how he knocked Bully-Knut down;

"And that off his own barn-roof he pitched Ola Per,
With a 'Next time, take food when you fly thro' the air.'

"When Hans Bugge was getting so mighty a fame,
That the land and the water resounded his name,

"In his pride he bragged 'Tailor! now say, if you dare,
Where you'll lie, and I'll spit, and your head shall be there.'

"'Just come here,' answered Nils, 'within reach of my arm!
Don't you know that mere swagger can't do any harm?'

"So they met: the first grapple proved neither the best,
And the hot-headed fellows prepared for the rest.

"At the second round, Bugge lost foothold and fell.
Have a care to the game, Hans! you'll need to play well!

"But the third time Nils flings him head-down on the stones
In his blood, as he jeers 'Spit away, lad!'——Hans groans."

The boy sang no farther; but there were two verses more, which his mother had *not* taught him:

"A tree's shadow hast seen o'er pure shining snow pass,
Our Nils hast thou seen, when he speaks with a lass?

"Our fine Nils hast thou seen as he lords it in dance?
Then away from him, Maid, e'er befall thee mischance."

These two verses the grandmother knew, and they came the more vividly back to her now, just because they were left missing. She said nothing to the boy, but to the mother she said:

"That's right: let the boy know all your shame; but don't forget the last two verses!"

Nils had now so given himself up to drink that he was no longer the man he used to be. There were many folks who thought it would soon be all over with him.

Now it happened that there were two Americans visiting the place, and they heard that there was a bridal near at hand; at once they felt a desire to see it, and observe the customs of the people. Nils was playing there. They gave a thaler each to the fiddler, and asked for the "Halling." No one would take upon himself to dance it, spite of all entreaties. One after another begged Nils himself to dance it; he was the best of them, after all, they said.

The more he refused, the more they pressed him, till at last they were all urging him to dance, and that was just what he wanted. He handed his fiddle to another man, laid aside jerkin and cap, and stepped, smiling, into the midst of the group. All the old anxious attention was on him now, and that gave him back his former vigour again. The onlookers pressed round him as closely as possible—those in the background mounted on tables and chairs—and girls strained to look over each other's heads. Foremost among these was a tall lass, with light, tawny-brown hair, blue eyes set deep beneath a broad brow, and a mouth with long curving lips that were often smiling, and were generally a little awry—it was Birgit Böen. Nils saw her as he cast his eyes up towards the rafters. The music struck up: utter silence fell upon all. Nils threw himself into the dance. He bounded over the floor, glided up the room in time to the music, with his body bending towards the ground, swayed now to one side, now to another, crossed his legs suddenly beneath him, sprang up again, made as if to throw himself over, and then glided along again all aslope. The fiddle was wielded by a doughty hand. The music grew more and more fierce.

Nils threw his head further and further back, and suddenly struck the beam above him with his heel, so that the dust came showering down on those below. There were shrieks of wonder and laughter around him, and the girls stood looking at him as if unable to draw breath. The music burst in upon them, and spurred him on anew with more and more energy. Nils by no means held back; he threw out his limbs, hopped in time to the music, gathered himself up as if for another leap, then, instead of taking it, glided forward again aslant as before, till, just as he saw no one was expecting it, he dashed his heel against the rafter overhead, and again and again turned a somersault, now forward, then backwards—and stood erect and motionless on his feet. That was enough. The fiddle gave out a trill and a flourish, and then a few wavering deep tones; finally, these died away in a single long bass note. The lookers-on dispersed about the room: the breathless stillness gave way to quick, loud talk, mingled with shouts and laughter. Nils was standing by the wall; the Americans came over to him with their interpreter, and gave him five thalers apiece. Then there was silence once more.

The Americans spoke for a moment or two with their interpreter. Then the latter asked him if he would go with them as their servant; he should have whatever wages he asked for.

"Where am I to go?" asked Nils, while all the people pressed up to him as close as they could.

"Out into the world," was the answer.

"When?" asked Nils, looking round him, with shining eyes, which encountered those of Birgit Böen, and held them fast.

"In a week, when they come back," he was answered.

"Maybe I shall be ready then," said Nils, weighing his two five-thaler pieces. He had leant one arm on the shoulder of the man standing next to him, and now was

trembling so that the latter tried to make him sit down on a bench.

"O, that's nothing!" answered Nils, and he staggered for a step or two over the floor. Then he turned quickly, and called for a jig.

All the girls had pressed forward. He looked round at them slowly and deliberately, and then went over to one in a dark frock—it was Birgit Böen. He stretched forth his hand, and she put out both hers. He gave a laugh, drew back, put his arm round a girl standing beside her, and danced off with hilarious glee. The blood rushed to Birgit's neck and face. A tall, quiet-looking man stood just behind her; he took her hand, and danced away, close after Nils. The latter saw it, but perhaps it was only from carelessness that he danced so hard up against them, that the man and Birgit fell to the ground with a heavy fall. Birgit got up, crept aside, and burst out bitterly weeping.

The quiet-looking man got up more slowly and went straight up to Nils, who was still going on dancing.

"You must stop a bit," said the man.

Nils paid no heed, so the other took him by the arm. Nils tore himself loose and looked him in the face.

"I don't know you," he said, with a smile.

"No; but you've got to know me now," said the quiet-looking man, and struck him straight over the eyes.

Nils, who was not expecting anything of the kind, fell with a dull, heavy thud right against the sharp corner of the stone grate. He tried to rise again, but could not—his back was broken.

At Kampen, things had undergone a change. The grandmother had been ailing of late, but as soon as she perceived it, she began to work even harder than before to get together the money for paying off the last instalment of the debt due on the farm.

"Then," she said, "you and the boy will have all you

need; but if ever you let anyone in to waste it for you, I shall turn round where I lie in my grave."

Late in the autumn, she had had the satisfaction of being able to jog up to the former owner with the remains of the debt; and a happy woman was she when she sat in her chair at home again, and said:

"Well, that's done now!"

But that very day she was stricken with mortal sickness. She had to take to her bed, and never left it again. Her daughter buried her in the churchyard, where there was room for the sleepers, and set up a fine headstone, on which were graved her name, her age, and a verse of one of Kingo's hymns.

A fortnight after the funeral, the grandmother's black gown was made into clothes for the boy, and as he stood in them, he looked as grave as if she were come back to life again. Of his own accord, he went to the clasped book with big print that his grandmother had read and sung out of every Sunday; he opened it, and found her spectacles lying there. These the boy had never been allowed to touch all his life; now he took them timidly up, put them on his nose, and looked through them at the book. All was misty.

"That's a very funny thing," thought the boy; "it was with them that grandmother used to read God's word."

He held them up to the light, to see what was the matter with them—and there lay the spectacles on the floor!

He was very frightened, and, as the door at that moment began to open, it seemed to him as if grandmother must be just about to come in; but it was his mother and six men, who, with much noise and tramping of feet, carried in between them a litter, which they set down in the middle of the room. The door stood long open behind them, so that the cold air came into the room.

On the litter lay a man with black hair and a pale face. The mother walked about, weeping.

"Lay him carefully down on the bed," she besought them, and helped them to do so. But all the while the men were moving about with him, there was a noise of something being crushed under their feet.

"Ah, that's only grandmother's spectacles," thought the boy; but he did not say it.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE WEDDING.

THIS was in the spring-time, as we have said. A week after the day that Nils Skrædder was taken to Margit Kampen's, came a message from the Americans that he was to hold himself in readiness. He happened just then to be lying writhing in dreadful pain; he bit his teeth together and cried out:

"Let them go to the devil!"

Margit stood still by his bed, as if she had had no answer. He noticed it, and a moment after, in a weary voice, he repeated:

"Let them—— go!"

Later on in the winter, he had got so far better that he could sit up, though his health was ruined for all his days. The first time he really got up, he drew forth his violin and tuned it, but it worked him up to such a pitch of excitement that he had to go back to bed again. He was very silent now, though easy to get on with, and as time went on he began to read with the boy, and to do work in the house; but he never went out, nor did he talk with people who came to see him. At first, Margit used to tell him news about things in the parish; but after it he would fall into a fit of gloomy depression, so she gave it up.

When spring came, he and Margit began to sit up later than before, and talk together after their supper. The boy was at those times sent off to bed. Somewhat later in the spring, their banns were given out in church, and they were shortly after very quietly married.

He took part of the work in the fields, and looked after everything sensibly and without fuss. To the boy, Margit said: "There is both help and comfort in him for us. Now you must be good and obedient, and do all that you can for him."

Margit had been a buxom lass through all her trouble; her face was ruddy and her eyes very large, and they looked the larger for the ring that had come round them. Her mouth was firm, and her face round, fresh, and healthy looking, though she was not very strong. Now she looked nicer than ever before, and she was constantly singing, as was her wont when she was at work.

Now it happened one Sunday afternoon that father and son had gone out, to see how things were getting on in the fields. Arne was frisking merrily along by his father, aiming hither and thither with a bow and arrows, which Nils himself had made for the boy. Thus going along, they got on to the road that led from the church and the parsonage into what was known as "The Plain." Nils sat down on a stone by the wayside and was soon lost in thought; the boy darted about in the road, and ran after his arrows, moving in the direction of the church.

"Take care!" cried the father, "don't go too far away!" Suddenly the boy stopped short in his agile movements, as if he were listening.

"Father!" he shouted, "I hear music!"

The man listened too; there was the sound of fiddles, and of loud and merry shouts, accompanied by the clatter of horses' hoofs and the rumbling of carriage wheels; it was a bridal troupe coming back from the church.

"Come here, boy!" shouted the father, and Arne knew from his voice that he must come at once.

Nils had suddenly risen, and drawn back behind a great tree. The boy followed.

"Not here—there!" And the boy fled behind a clump of alders.

Already the train of carriages was turning the corner by the birch copse, and they came galloping along: the horses were white with foam, and men and women merry with drink were shouting and singing; father and son counted carriage after carriage; there were in all fourteen. In the first sat two fiddlers, and the bride-march rang out through the clear, dry air: a boy stood up behind them, driving. Next came the bride, with a wreath on her head, sitting up erect and bright in the rays of the sun; she was smiling, with her lips curved slightly to one side; by her side was a man in blue clothes, with a gentle, cheerful face. A long procession followed; men sitting on women's laps, little lads perched up behind them, drunken folks driving, half-a-dozen pulled along by one horse; in the last vehicle came the caterer, holding a cask of brandy on his knees. They sped by, shouting and singing, and dashed headlong down the hill. The noise of the fiddlers, the shouts of merriment, and the rattling of wheels was borne back through the cloud of dust that followed them, then melted into one single sound, which gave place to a dull murmur, and finally died away. Nils was still standing motionless, when he heard a rustle behind him; he turned round; it was the boy who had crept forth again.

"Who was that, father?" But Arne started as he saw the gloom on his father's face; he stopped for a moment, waiting for an answer, and then remained standing still when he got none. At last his patience gave out, and he ventured to speak again.

"Shall we go?" he murmured.

Nils seemed still to be looking after the bridal train, but now he pulled himself together, and began to move. Arne followed him. He put an arrow to his bow, shot it away, and ran off after it.

"Don't trample the grass down!" said Nils, sternly. The boy let the arrow lie where it was, and came back again. Presently, though, he forgot, and whilst the father stood still again, he threw himself down on the meadow, and began turning somersaults.

"Don't trample the grass down, I tell you!" cried Nils, and pulled the boy by the arm as if he meant to dislocate it. After that, the boy followed his father in silence.

Margit stood in the doorway waiting for them; she had just come back from the cow-house, where she must have been hard at work, for her hair was all untidy, her linen was soiled and stained, and her clothes were in the same state; but she smiled as she stood there in the doorway.

"Some of the cows got loose," she said, "and did some mischief, but they're made fast again now."

"Can't you manage to look a bit decent of Sundays?" growled Nils, as he thrust by into the sitting-room.

"Yes. Now that work's over, it's time to get tidy," said Margit, as she followed him. Immediately she began to change her clothes, singing as she did so; for Margit sang well, though at times she was a trifle hoarse.

"Stop that row!" shouted Nils, from the bed on which he had thrown himself, and Margit was silent at once.

Just then in rushed the boy.

"There's a great black dog," he cried, "that's come running into the yard—a great ugly thing——"

"Be quiet, boy!" yelled Nils, getting half off the bed to stamp with one foot on the ground. "Curse it, the devil must be in the brat!" he mumbled, as he drew up his feet again. The mother gave the boy a threatening glance. "Can't you see," she said, "father's not in good spirits?"

"Won't you have strong coffee with syrup?" she went on to Nils, trying to coax him into good humour again. This was a beverage that the grandmother had liked, and the others too. Nils had no liking for it, but he used to drink it all the same, because the others did so. "Won't you have some strong coffee and syrup?" she repeated, for he had not answered the first time. Nils raised himself on his elbows:

"Do you think," he screamed, "I'll swallow that muck?"

Margit was dumb with astonishment: she put her hand on the boy, and went out with him. They had various things to do out of doors, and so they did not come back till supper-time. Nils was not within doors. Arne was sent out to the fields to call him in, but he could not find him anywhere. They waited till the food was nearly cold; but when they had finished supper Nils was not yet back. Margit began to grow anxious; she sent the boy to bed, and sat down to wait. A little after midnight, in came Nils.

"Where have you been, dear?" asked she.

"That's no business of yours," he answered, and sat slowly down on the bench. He was drunk.

From that day, Nils was constantly going down to the town, and each time he came back again tipsy.

"I can't stop in here with you," he cried once, when he came in. She began to answer him with gentle words, but he stamped upon the floor, and bade her be silent. If he was drunk, that was her fault, he said. If he was wicked, that was her fault too. If he was a cripple and a miserable creature for all the days of his life, that was all the fault of her, and that confounded brat of hers.

"Why," he cried, bursting into tears, "were you always coming after me, and hanging about me? What harm did I do you, that you could not leave me in peace?"

"But Heaven bless me and preserve me!" said Margit, "was it I that came after you then?"

"Yes, that it was!" he screamed through his tears; and springing up he went on: "And now at last you've got it all as you wanted it; I go crawling about here from tree to tree; every day I creep around, looking at my own grave. And I might have lived grandly with the richest and finest girl in the place, I might have travelled as far as the sun travels, had not you and your confounded boy thrown yourselves in my way."

"That was no fault of the boy's, at any rate," she said, trying to answer him.

"If you won't hold your noise," he screamed, "I'll strike you!" And he struck her.

Next day, when he had slept off the effects of the liquor, he was ashamed of himself, and much kinder than usual to the boy. But he soon drank again, and then again he struck her; at length he got to beating her each time he was tipsy. The boy wept and moaned, and then he got beaten too. At times, too, Nils was so wild with remorse that he could not stay within doors. Now, too, he began to yearn to go to dances again; he played his fiddle as of old, and took the boy with him to carry the case. There Arne saw many things. The mother wept at the lad's constantly going to such places, but dared not say anything to the father.

"Cling fast to God," she earnestly begged him, as she kissed him, "and learn nothing wicked."

But it was very cheerful and amusing at the dances, and here at home it was neither cheerful nor amusing. He turned more and more from her to his father: she marked it, and was silent. Arne picked up all sorts of songs at these dances, and sang them afterwards to his father; this amused the latter, and sometimes the boy was even able to make him laugh. This so flattered the lad that he took care to learn as many songs as possible; soon, too, he got to see what sort his father liked best, and what it was in

them that he laughed at. If there was nothing of the sort in the song, the boy put it in himself as well as he could, and so he early got used to putting words to music. Nils liked best to hear jeering songs, and horrid ditties about folks who had risen to prosperity and power; so that was the sort of thing that Arne sang.

At length the mother wished to have him with her of an evening to help in the cow-shed; he made all sorts of excuses to get off, but they proved unavailing, and he had to go with her. Then it was that she spoke earnestly to him of God and all that is good, and ended, as she folded him in her arms, by tearfully begging and praying him not to grow up a bad man.

The mother used to read with him, and the boy was most wonderfully quick to learn. His father was very proud of this, and got into the way of telling him—especially when he had been drinking—that he had *his* head.

But at the dances Nils soon grew accustomed to ordering Arne, after he himself had had too much, to sing to the company. The boy sang one song after another, amid loud applause and laughter; the applause delighted the boy almost more than it did Nils, so that at last there was no end to the songs he learned to sing. Anxious mothers, hearing him, went to his own mother and told her, for the songs he sang were not fit for a boy. The mother took the boy aside, and bade him, in the name of God and all that is good, not to sing such songs; and now it seemed to the boy that his mother was against everything he delighted in. He told his father for the first time what his mother had said. She had to suffer for it in consequence next time Nils got drunk, but after that, Arne never told him anything again. What he had done came now vividly before the lad, and in his soul he besought God and her for forgiveness, for he could not bring himself to

do so openly. The mother was as kind to him as ever, and this cut him to the heart.

Once, however, he forgot himself. He had the power of mimicking anybody, especially as regards their way of speaking and singing. One evening, when he was amusing his father by this, his mother came in, and when she had gone out again it came into Nils' head to make the boy imitate his mother's singing. At first he refused, but the father, who lay on the bed, laughing so that his sides shook, persisted obstinately in his demand.

"Well," thought the boy, "she's a good way off, so she won't hear it;" and he sang just as she did at times when she was hoarse and inclined to tears. The father laughed so that it almost frightened the lad himself, and he left off of his own accord. Then Margit came in from the kitchen, looked mournfully and steadfastly at Arne, walked over to the dresser for a bowl, and went out again.

Arne felt hot as fire throughout his whole body. She had heard it all, then! He sprang down from the table on which he had been sitting, dashed out, and threw himself down on the ground as if he would fain bury himself in it. He could not rest; he sprang up, feeling he must get further away. He rushed by the barn, and there behind it sat his mother, hemming a new and fine shirt for him. At other times she used to sing a hymn over her work when she sat thus; now she was not singing —not that she was weeping, either—she was just sitting still, sewing. But Arne could endure it no longer; he threw himself down on the grass at her feet, looked up at her, and sobbed passionately. The mother let her sewing fall, and put her two hands round his head.

"Poor Arne!" she said, and threw herself down beside him.

He did not make an attempt to speak, but wept as he never had before.

"I knew quite well," said the mother, stroking his hair, "that you were good at heart."

"Mother, you won't say No to what I'm going to ask you?" was the first thing he could say.

"That you know I never do," was the answer.

He tried to check his tears, and then, with his head in her lap, he blurted out:

"Mother, sing me something!"

"My dear, I can't, you know," she said in a low voice.

"Mother, sing me something!" implored he, "else I'll never believe that I'm fit to look at you again!"

She stroked his hair again, but made no sound.

"Mother, sing, sing! do you hear, sing!" he sobbed out, "else I'll go far away and never come back home again."

And as he lay there, big boy of fourteen or fifteen as he was, with his head in his mother's lap, she began to sing over him:

"Lord, protect this little child,
Playing on the rugged shore.
Round him bid Thy Spirit mild
Cast its bonds for evermore.
Mighty waves nor treach'rous sand
Tear him from that sacred band.
Safe and blessèd will he live,
Praise to Thee and glory give.

"Mother sits in anxious pain,
Knowing not why thus he tarries;
Calls him o'er and o'er again,
No reply the stillness carries.
Yet she knows, where'er the spot,
Help divine forsakes him not.
Far from angry wave and foam,
Jesus leads him gently home."

She sang several verses: Arne lay still, for a holy peace had fallen upon him, and under its sway he felt refreshed,

and wearily restful. The last word that he heard distinctly was "Jesus." It seemed to carry him into a great burst of light where twelve or thirteen voices sang clear; and above them all he could hear his mother's. Sweeter music he had never known; he prayed that it might be given him so to sing. It seemed to him that if he were to sing very softly, he too should learn how to do it; so now he began to sing softly, and then more and more softly, until the music seemed well-nigh heavenly, and in his joy at this he pealed forth in loud tones—and all was at an end. He was awake again: he looked up and listened intently, but nothing struck on his ear, save the mighty, unceasing noise of the waterfall, and the sound of the little streamlet which, with soft and constant murmur, flowed close by the barn. The mother had gone; but first she had laid beneath his head his jacket and the half-finished shirt.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DAYBREAK.

NOW that the time had come for the cattle to be looked after in the woods, Arne wanted to tend them. Nils was against it; as yet he had never taken part in such work, and he was now in his fifteenth year. But he pleaded his cause so well that it was decided in the way he wished, and all that spring, summer, and autumn he was only at home to sleep; he was in the woods by himself the livelong day.

He took his books with him to the woods: he spent his time in reading and cutting letters on the bark of trees, in walking and thinking, in dreamy yearnings and singing; but in the evening, when he got home, the father would often be drunk and strike the mother, cursing her and the place as he cried that once he had had the chance of travelling far away from it all. Then the boy was seized with a longing for travel. At home all was amiss, and his books increased his longing to depart—nay, sometimes the very air seemed to be calling him over the mighty mountains.

Thus things were, when at midsummer time he fell in with Kristen, the Captain's eldest son, who had come to the woods with one of the farm lads for the horses, so as to ride back home. He was a boy a few years older than

Arne, light-hearted and full of fun, ever restless in all his thoughts, but, notwithstanding, firm and steadfast of purpose. He spoke quickly and jerkily, and often of two things at a time; he rode horses bare-backed; shot birds on the wing, and knew all about fly-fishing; in short, he seemed to Arne a very model in all things. He, too, was yearning to travel, and talked to Arne of far-off lands till they seemed to lie shining before him. He found out Arne's love of reading, and brought up to him books that he himself had read, and when these were finished he got new ones. On Sundays he would come with geography and maps, and explain them to him, and Arne read so eagerly all that summer and winter that he grew quite pale and thin.

In winter he got them to let him read at home, partly because he was to be confirmed next year, and partly because he had a way of managing his father. He began, too, to go to school now; but there he was most content when he could shut his eyes and call up to his mind his books at home. Henceforth, he had no companions among the peasant lads.

The father's ill-treatment of the mother increased with years, as did also his physical ailments and his drunkenness. But when, spite of this, Arne had to sit at home and amuse him to get his mother an hour's peace, and to do so had often to talk in a way which now in his heart he despised, he began to loathe his father; but this feeling he kept closely to himself, as he did his love for his mother. When he met Kristen their talk was of travel and books; he said nothing—even to him—of how things were at home. But many a time when, after long, deep converse with him, he walked home alone, thinking of what would very likely be going on there, he burst into tears, and prayed to God among His stars so to order things that it should be granted him to journey forth before long.

In summer, Kristen and he were confirmed. Straightway the former began to carry out his plans. His father had no choice but to let him go away and become a sailor. He gave Arne his books, promised to write to him often, and travelled forth into the world.

So now Arne was left alone.

It was then that the longing to write songs came again upon him. But now he no longer patched up old ones; he composed new songs, putting into them all his sorrowful feelings.

But his heart was too heavy, it seemed to him, and his grief could not be pressed into verse. Through the long nights he lay sleepless, till at last it seemed quite certain to him that he could no longer endure his life there; he must go away, he felt, and find Kristen, without saying a word to anyone. But when he thought of his mother, and of what would become of her, he scarcely dared to look her in the face.

One night at this time, he was sitting up very late, reading. Whenever he felt more depressed than usual, it was his books he fled to, never noticing that they only made him smart the more. The father was away at a wedding-feast, but was expected home that evening: the mother was tired and dreaded his return, so had gone to bed. Arne heard a dull fall in the passage, and started up: there was the noise of some heavy thing striking against the door. It was the father returning.

Arne opened the door, and looked down at him.

"Is that you, my bright boy?" hiccupped Nils; "then come and help your daddy up."

Arne lifted him up and supported him to a bench, picked up the fiddle-case, brought it in too, and shut the door.

"Ay, look at me, my bright boy," Nils rambled on. "I'm not much to look at now; I'm no longer the Nils I

once was. Let this warn you—I warn you—you—nev—never to touch brandy; that's the very Devil,—the World, the Flesh, the Devil. 'He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble and meek.' Alas! alas! what have I come to!"

He sat still for a moment, and then sang through his drunken tears:

"'Jesus Christ, Redeemer mine,
Help I need, so grant me Thine;
Deep in mire although I lie,
Still Thine erring child am I.'

"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof; but say but the word——"

He threw himself forward, hid his face in his hands, and sobbed convulsively. Long he lay thus, and then he began to repeat word for word from the Bible, as he had learnt it more than twenty years before:

"But she came and begged Him, and said: Lord, help me! But He answered and said: It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. But she said: Yea, Lord: but the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

He relapsed into silence again, but wept more freely and less violently.

The mother had long been awake, but had not dared to look up; but now, when she heard him weeping as one who had been rescued, she raised herself on her elbows and looked up.

But no sooner did Nils catch sight of her than he screamed:

"Do you look up—you! you want to see what you've brought me to, don't you? Yes, this is what I look like; just this—here before you!" He began to rise, and she crouched beneath the coverlet. "No, no, don't hide your-

self! I'll find you soon enough," he said, and stretching forth his right hand, he began to fumble about with his forefinger. "Tickle! tickle!" he cried, and he drew aside the coverlet and put his forefinger on her throat.

"Father!" cried Arne.

"Look how shrivelled up and lean you've got," Nils went on, "there's no flesh on you at all. Tickle! tickle!" The mother convulsively seized his hands with both hers, but she could not free herself from his grasp: she crouched in a heap beneath the coverlet.

"Father!" cried Arne again.

"So! there's some life in you now, is there?" Nils went on, unheeding. "What a sight she is when she wriggles, too! Tickle! tickle!"

"Father!" cried Arne once more, and the room began to go up and down.

"Tickle, I say!" screamed Nils.

She let go his hands and gave herself up to her fate.

"Father!" shrieked Arne, and rushed to a corner of the room where stood an axe.

"It's only obstinacy that keeps you from crying out," Nils went on. "You'd better take care, though; such a funny thought's got hold of me now! Come, come! tickle, tickle!"

"Father!" cried Arne for the last time. He laid hold of the axe, but stood still as if nailed to the floor; for at that moment the father rose up, gave a piercing shriek, pressed his hand to his heart, and fell to the earth. "Jesus Christ" came to his lips, and then he lay quite still.

Arne scarcely knew where he stood or what was happening; he almost expected the room to burst apart, and a flash from the heavens to fall upon it. Suddenly the mother began to draw long, deep breaths, as if she had freed herself of an incubus; presently she raised her-

self in the bed, and saw the father lying outstretched on the floor, and the son standing over him, axe in hand.

"Merciful Heaven! what have you done?" she shrieked, as, springing out of bed, and throwing a garment round her, she drew near to him. Then something seemed to set free Arne's tongue.

"He fell down by himself," he said, in a low tone.

"Oh Arne, Arne, I don't believe you!" cried the mother in an earnest, reproachful voice. "Now may Christ help you!" And she cast herself upon the body, with a burst of wailing.

But now the boy began to emerge from his bewilderment, and he too fell on his knees.

"Sure as I hope for mercy from God," he said, "he fell of himself, just as he stood there."

"Then our Lord Himself has been here!" said the woman quietly, and, crouching down, she gazed fixedly before her.

Nils lay just as he fell, with stiffened limbs, and open eyes and mouth. His hands were near together, as if he had tried to fold them, but had not had time.

"Come," said the mother, "you are strong; help me to lift your father up, so that he may lie on the bed."

They raised him up and laid him on it: she closed his eyes and mouth, straightened out his limbs, and folded his hands.

They both stood there looking at him. All that they had lived through before seemed not to have lasted so long, nor to have had so much in it as had the last hour. The Devil himself had been there, but so also had God; the encounter had been brief. All that had been was now over and done.

It was now a little past midnight, and they had to watch by the dead till daybreak. Arne went to the hearth and

made a great fire; the mother sat down beside it. And as she sat there she thought of the many evil days she had gone through with Nils, so that she thanked God in fever-fervent prayer for what he had done. "But all the same I had some happy days with him, too," she said, and wept as if in remorse for the thanksgiving that had just escaped her; and before long she was taking all the blame upon herself, in that, for love of the dead, she had transgressed God's law, and broken her mother's commands; and therefore (she thought) it was right for her own sinful love to have been her punishment.

Arne sat down opposite to her. The mother glanced at the bed and said:

"Arne, you must remember that it's for your sake I have borne it all," and she burst into tears, longing for a loving word to support her 'mid the flow of her own self-reproaches, and comfort her in all the time to come. The boy trembled, but had nothing to say.

"You must never leave me," she sobbed out. Then there came before his eyes all that she had been in the sorrowful past, and how unutterably lonely she would feel if, in return for all her loving kindness to him, he were to forsake her now.

"Never, never!" he said, in a low, fervent voice; he wanted to go over to where she sat, but felt as if he could not move. There sat both of them, weeping bitterly; at times she prayed aloud, now for the dead, and again for herself and her boy; then came the tears again, to be interrupted presently by supplications to Heaven, which again gave place to lamentation. At last she said:

"Arne, you have a good voice; sit a little way off and sing a hymn for your father."

Straightway he seemed to find strength to do it. He got up, fetched a hymn-book, and kindled a fir-splinter; then, with the torch in one hand and the book in the other,

he stood by the head of the bed, and sang in a clear voice Kingo's 127th hymn:

"Turn from us in grace Thine anger sore,
Call us not Thy judgment seat before.
Grant to us Thy servants, sinful-living,
Thy forgiving!"

## CHAPTER V.

### UPLAND KNUT.

ARNE grew up reserved and shy; he went on tending the cattle and making songs. Though he was in his twentieth year, he still went with the herds to summer pasture. He got the pastor to lend him books to read, and that was the only thing he cared for.

The pastor urged him to become a school-teacher, saying that his faculties and learning ought to be turned to the advantage of the community. Arne did not answer at once, but on the following day, as he was driving his sheep to pasture, he made this song:

"Little skipping lamb of mine,
Follow close the herd-bell's chime;
Though the road be steep and high,
Listen to my guiding cry.

"Little skipping lamb of mine,
Keep for me that fleece of thine;
For my mother 'twill provide
Garments warm in wintertide.

"Little skipping lamb of mine,
Keep your flesh all soft and fine;
You are chosen from the troop,
As the lamb to make our soup."

When in his twentieth year, he one day chanced to overhear a conversation between his mother and the wife of the former owner of the farm. They disagreed about a horse that they owned in common.

"I will wait and hear what Arne says," said his mother.

"That sluggard!" answered the other, "he'd just as lief as not have the horse wandering about all day in the woods, as he does himself, I dare say!"

Then the mother was silent, though she had spoken up well enough before.

Arne turned as red as fire. Never had it occurred to him before that his mother should be put to shame on his account. "Though, perhaps," thought he now, "it may often have happened. But why had she never told him, then?"

He kept thinking about it till it brought to his mind that his mother scarcely ever spoke to him; but then he never spoke to her either. Indeed, whom did he ever speak to?

Many a Sunday, when he sat silent at home, he would have liked to have read aloud a sermon to his mother—her own eyes were not good enough, for she had done too much weeping in her life—but he could not bring himself to do it. Many a time, too, he would have liked to offer to read aloud from his own books, when all at home was silence, and it seemed to him that she must be finding it rather dull. But he could not bring himself to do it.

"Well, well!" he thought, at last, "I'll give up going to the woods with the cattle, and spend my time down here with mother."

Firm in this resolve, he went to the woods, as usual, for a few days, drove the herds far and wide for pasture, and made this song meanwhile:

"The parish is all restless, but there's peace in grove and wood,
No beadle here impounds you, to suit his crabbèd mood;

No strife profanes *our* little church, tho' there it rages high,
But then we *have* no little church, and that perhaps is why!

"How happy is the woodland grove, despite the eager way
The hawk will chase the sparrow that he chooses for his prey;
And tho' on some ill-fated thing the eagle swoops to ground,
The little beast without it would a speedy grave have found.

"One tree is conquered by the axe, while skyward rises one;
The fox has torn the lambkin ere the setting of the sun.
The wolf has killed the little fox, now both are lying dead,
For Arne shot the hungry wolf before the night had fled.

"In valley and in woodland there are many things to see,
But of one thing be you certain, that your sight unclouded be.
I dreamed I saw a stripling—by his hand his father fell;
It seemed to me, I know not how, this thing was done in hell."

He came home and told his mother that she must send to the village and get a herd-boy; he meant to look after the farm himself henceforth, he said. So it was settled; and now the mother was ever about him, with tender admonitions not to overwork. She got into the habit, too, at this time, of giving him such dainty meals, that he often felt ashamed to eat them; but he said nothing.

There was a song in his heart whose burden was: "Over the mountains high!" Somehow or other he could not finish it, chiefly because he wanted the refrain to come in every other line; afterwards, he gave up that idea.

But many of the songs he made got spread about among the people, who liked them well. There were some who would have been glad to talk with him, especially such as had known about him from his childhood. But Arne was shy of all whom he did not know, and disliked them; chiefly because he believed they disliked him.

At his side in all his field-work was a labourer, known as Upland Knut, a middle-aged man, who was in the habit of singing at times, but it was always the same song that he sang. When this had gone on for a couple of

months, Arne felt impelled to ask him if he knew no other songs.

"No," answered the man.

Some days went by, and then, when the peasant was once more singing his song, Arne asked:

"How did you come to learn just that one song?"

"Ah!" replied the other, "so it happened——"

Arne went from him straight home. There sat the mother, weeping—a thing he had not seen her do since his father's death. He made as if he had not noticed it, and turned to the door again; but he felt that the mother was looking at him mournfully, and had perforce to check his steps.

"Why are you crying, mother?" he said.

For a moment or two, his words were the only sound in the room; they seemed to keep repeating themselves to him, and he felt that they had not been gentle enough.

"Why are you crying, mother?" he asked once more.

"Ah!" said the mother, weeping still more, "I don't really know."

He stood silent for a while, and then he said, as boldly as he could:

"There must be something you're weeping for."

There was silence again, and Arne began to feel very guilty, although she had not reproached him, and he knew of nothing he had done to pain her.

"I just felt fit to cry," said the mother, at length; and then, after a pause, she added, "I'm so happy really at heart," and then she burst out weeping again.

But Arne hastened out, and his heart bore him on to the ravine. He sat beside it, and looked down into it; suddenly, as he was sitting so, he began to weep.

"If only I knew what these tears are for!" said Arne.

Up above on the new-ploughed field sat Uplands Knut, singing his song.

"Ingerid Sletten, of Sillegjord-mere,
Had neither of silver nor golden store;
But hers was one treasure she valued far more,
For a gift 'twas of old from her mother so dear.

"Sure 'twas one of the plainest and simplest of things,
Just a hood for her head made of soft wool, dyed bright;
But the thoughts of her mother that rose at its sight,
Made it fairer to her than the treasure of kings.

"So she took it with careful and reverent hand,
And for full twenty years did she lay it aside:
'I will wear thee,' she said, 'when some day as a bride,
Little hood, at the altar all joyous I stand.'

"For thirty long years did it still lie aside,
She fearing to spoil it or wear it away;
'O my own little hood,' she would oftentimes say,
'In God's presence I'll wear thee one day as a bride.'

"For forty long years it lay hidden away,
And Ingerid thought of her mother so dear;
'Thee, my poor little hood,' cried she, 'never, I fear,
Shall I wear, if I wait for the glad bridal day.'

"And her heart it was heavy with tears and with teen,
As she went to the box, forth her treasure to draw.
She looked at its place—that was all that she saw,
For there was not a thread of the hood to be seen."

Arne sat listening, as if music had fallen on his ear from the mountains far away. He went up to Knut.

"Have you a mother?" he asked.

"No."

"Have you a father?"

"Ah no! No father."

"Is it long since they died?"

"Ah yes! 'Twas long ago."

"I suppose you've not got very many friends?"

"Ah no! not many."

"Have you any here?"

"Ah no! not here."

"But you have some in your own village, I suppose?"

"Ah no! not there either."

"Have you no one at all, then, to love you?"

"Ah no! I have no one."

When Arne left him, he felt as if his heart was so full of love to his mother that it must surely burst, and it seemed to him as if there was a halo of light about him.

"Thou God in Heaven," he thought, "Thou hast given me her, and in her such unspeakable love—and yet I put her aside—perhaps when I want to draw her to me again, she will be no more!" He felt he must go to her, if for nothing else, then just to see her. But on the way a sudden thought struck him. "What if, because you do not sufficiently prize her, you were to be punished by soon losing her?" He stood stock-still. "Almighty God!" he cried, "what would become of me then?"

At that moment, it seemed to him as if some terrible misfortune was taking place at home; he rushed toward the house, cold sweat breaking out on his brow, his feet scarcely touching the ground as he ran. He tore open the house door; once inside, it seemed as if the air was filled with peace. Gently he opened the door of the room. The mother was in bed, and the moonbeams were shining upon her face. She lay there, sleeping like a child.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ARNE'S STORY.

SOME days later, mother and son, who had lately been more together, agreed to go to the wedding of some relatives at a neighbouring farm. The mother had not been to a party since she was a girl,

They scarcely knew the people there except by name, and to Arne especially it seemed strange how all looked at him wherever he was.

Something was said about him as he walked through the passage once; he was not quite certain what it was, but every drop of blood in his veins began to boil when he thought of it.

He kept following about and looking at the man who had said it; at last he took his seat beside him. But when they were at table, the man's conversation took quite a different turn.

"Now I'll tell you a story," said he, "which shows that nothing can be hidden so deep down in the darkness but it comes to light some day." It seemed to Arne that the man was looking at him. He was an ugly-looking fellow, with thin red hair that overhung a wide, round forehead, below which were a pair of very small eyes, a little snub nose, and a very large mouth with pale, projecting lips.

*When he laughed, he showed all his gums. His hands,* which were on the table, were very large and coarse, though the wrists were slender enough. He threw quick, fierce glances around him, and spoke quickly, though with effort. He was nicknamed "Ugly Jaws," and Arne knew that Nils Skrædder had given him a rough time of it in the old days.

"Yes," went on the man, "there's much sin in this world; it is often nearer to us than we think—— Well, well! listen now to the story of an ugly deed. Those here who are old enough will remember Alf the Packman. 'Soon come again!' was Alf's saying, and people have got into the habit of saying it from him; for whenever he'd driven a good bargain—and what a hand he was at a bargain, to be sure!—he threw his pack on his back, and off he was, with a 'Soon come again!' O, a devil of a fellow was Alf!—a fine, jolly old boy was the packman.

"Well now, about him and Big Lazy. Big Lazy—why, you knew him, of course? Big he was, and lazy too—that's certain. Well, he fell in love with a jet-black pony of Alf's, which the packman had trained to jump like a grasshopper, and before Big Lazy himself right well knew it, Alf had got him to give fifty dollars for the nag! Into a carriole jumped Big Lazy, big as he was, to drive like the king with his fifty-dollar horse; but though he might curse it and lash it till the dust flew about in clouds, the horse ran full tilt against every door or wall that stood in its way; for it was stone-blind!

"Well now, whenever these two met they fell a-fighting about the horse, quarrelling all over the parish like two dogs. Big Lazy demanded his money back again, but never got a stiver of it: the packman beat him each time till he could drub him no longer. 'Soon come again!' said Alf, as he left him. O, a devil of a fellow was Alf, I can tell you!—a fine, jolly old boy of a packman!

"Well now, years went by, and Alf never came again.

Some ten years after this, however, a notice was given out from the church for him to come back, for a big fortune had been left him. Big Lazy stood by. 'Ah!' he cried, 'I knew well enough that it was not men but money that wanted Packman Alf back!'

'Then folks all began to talk about Alf again, and from all the gossip this much was certain, that he was last seen not on the *other* side of the mountain ridge, but on *this* side. You remember the road over the ridge—the old road—don't you?

"Now Big Lazy had, during the last few years, got very rich and prosperous, in his farm and in other property. He had also grown very religious, and every one knew that he didn't become religious all of a sudden for nothing, not he—any more than anyone else. These things set folks a thinking.

"It was about this time that the way over the ridge was re-made. Our grandfathers liked to be able to go straight to a place, and so the road ran right over the ridge; but we want to have it all smooth and easy, so now the road goes down along by the river. Well, there was such a hubbub with all the blasting and mining, that you might have thought the whole mountain-side was coming down. All sorts of official people came to see it, but most of all came the mayor, for he travelled to and fro without payment. Well, one day, as the workmen were digging away the rocky earth a man grasped what he thought was a stone, but it was a hand, sticking out amid the stones, and so strong was the hand that the man who touched it fell back at the touch—and that man was Big Lazy.

"The mayor was not far off; he was fetched at once, and all the bones of a man were dug out. The doctor too was fetched, and he put all the bones together so cunningly that all it now lacked was flesh. And now folks began to declare that the skeleton was just the size of Alf

the Packman. 'Soon come again!' said Alf the Packman.

"Well now, one and another began to think it queer that a dead hand could knock down a fellow like Big Lazy, especially without striking him. The mayor straightway took him where they could not be overheard, and taxed him with the murder. But then Big Lazy swore he was innocent with such oaths that the mayor turned faint.

"Well, well! if it wasn't you, you're man enough to sleep with the skeleton to-night, arn't you?'

"'Yes, of course I am!' answered Big Lazy.

"So the doctor bound the bones at the joints and laid the skeleton on one of the beds in the barrack-room. Big Lazy was to lie in the other bed, while the mayor, wrapped round in his cloak, kept close to the wall on the other side. When it was dark, and time for Big Lazy to join his bedfellow, the door seemed to close behind him of its own accord, and shut him off from the light. But Big Lazy began to sing hymns, for he had a very strong voice.

"'Why are you singing hymns?' asked the mayor from without.

"'Because I don't know whether bells were ever tolled and hymns sung for him,' answered Big Lazy.

"Then for a long time all was so still that the mayor had very nearly fallen asleep. Suddenly there was an awful scream, that shook the whole building.

"'Soon come again!' it rang out. There was the noise of fiendish confusion within.

"'Let's have those fifty dollars of mine!' roared Big Lazy, and then came a scream and a crash. The mayor burst open the door; in rushed the people with sticks and torches, and there lay Big Lazy in the middle of the floor, and on top of him the skeleton!"

There was unbroken silence all round the table. At length one said, lighting his clay pipe the while:

"He went mad from that day, didn't he?"

"He did."

Arne felt as if all eyes were on him, and he could not muster courage to look up.

"I say, as I said before," resumed the man who had told the story, "there's nothing can be hidden so deep down in the darkness but it comes to light some day."

"Well, now," said a fair-haired, thick-set, round-faced man, "I'll tell you about a son who struck his own father."

Arne felt as if he scarce knew where he was sitting.

"There was once a quarrelsome, bullying fellow," the man went on, "belonging to a good family up there in Hardanger, and he had got the better of many a man. Now, he and his father had a quarrel about money matters, and this made him as cantankerous at home as he was abroad.

"Well, his goings on grew worse and worse, and his father kept getting more and more angry with him. 'No one shall be my master!' said the son. 'That shall I,' said the father, 'as long as I live.'

"'If you don't be quiet, I'll strike you!' said the son, and he raised his arm.

"'Just you dare, and you'll never have a moment's happiness in this world,' said the father, raising himself too.

"'Think so?' said the son, and he fell upon the other and threw him to the ground. But the father made no resistance: he only folded his arms and let him do as he would.

"The son beat him, laid hold of him, and pulled him to the door.

"'I *will* have peace at home!' he cried.

"But when they got to the door, the father half raised himself.

*"'No further than the door!' he cried; 'just so far: that did I drag my own father!'*

*"The son paid no heed; he dragged his father's head over the threshold.*

"'No further than the door, I tell you!' cried the old man. He got up, threw his son to the ground at his feet, and beat him like a child."

"What an awful story!" cried several voices.

"How shocking to strike one's father!" Arne seemed to hear someone saying; but he was not certain.

"Now *I'll* tell you something," said Arne; and he got up, pale as a corpse, and not knowing what he was to say. All he saw was words whirling about him like snowflakes. "Let me catch them as they fly," he thought, and he began:

"A troll once met a boy walking along the road and crying. 'Whom are you most afraid of?' asked the troll, 'yourself, or somebody else?'

"Now, the boy was crying, as it happened, because the night before he had dreamed that he had been obliged to kill his wicked old father, so he answered:

"'Myself.'

"'Be at peace with yourself, then, and never weep again; for henceforth you shall be at variance only with others,' and so saying the troll went his way.

"Now the first whom the boy met laughed scornfully at him, and the boy could not but sneer at him in return. The next whom he met dealt him a blow, and the boy defended himself and struck back. The third whom he met tried to kill him, so the boy had to kill *him*.

"And now every one began to speak ill of the boy, so that he knew nothing but ill to speak of every one. They locked all their cupboards and bolted their doors, so that whatever he needed he must perforce steal: even his night's lodging he was forced to get by stealth. And now

*that he was unable to find anything good to do, he must needs find something evil. Then all the parish began to be saying: 'Really we must get rid of this boy, he is so wicked.' So one fine day they took him and put him out of pain.* Now the boy himself had no idea that he had done anything wrong, and so after death he was sent straight to our Lord's presence. There on one bench sat his father (whom, as you know, he had not killed), and on another, just opposite him, all those who had been the cause of his doing evil.

"'Which bench are you afraid of?' said God. The boy pointed to the long row of faces.

"'Sit down by your father, then,' said our Lord; and the boy went to do so—but just then down tumbled the father from the bench, with a great wound in his neck. In place of him sat the figure of the boy himself, but with horror-stricken face and features pale as death. Then came another figure of himself, this time with a drunkard's face, and bloated, drink-swollen body; and after him one with vacant eyes, torn garment, and horrid laughter.

"'Even as one of these might *you* have been,' said our Lord.

"'Even as these!' repeated the boy, and he put out his hand to touch God's garment. At that, down fell both benches from the heavens, and the boy stood there before his God's face and laughed.

"'Think on that when you awake!' said our Maker—and at that moment the boy awoke.

"Now the boy who dreamed all this was I, and those who tempt him by thinking ill of him are—you! Myself I no longer fear, but of you and for you I am indeed afraid, for I know not whether it will be granted *me* to touch the garment of our Lord."

He dashed out of the room, and all the people looked at one another.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SELF-REPROACH.

IT was the day after, in the barn of that same farm. Arne had drunk too much, for the first time in his life. It had upset him, and he had lain in the barn there for the best part of the four-and-twenty hours. He was sitting up now, leaning on his elbows and talking to himself in this fashion:

"Everything, I see, can be brought home to my cowardice. I didn't run away when I was a boy—that was cowardice; I heeded father more than mother—that was cowardice; I sang dirty songs to him—that was cowardice; I took up with going with the cattle to pasture, just out of cowardice; with reading—yes, that was cowardice, too—I only wanted to hide from myself. Even when I was no longer a boy, I didn't take mother's part against father—coward that I was! and even that night—coward! coward!—I did not—coward! I should very likely have done nothing till he had killed her! I could no longer endure home—coward! yet I didn't go away either—coward! I just did nothing: I went and watched the cattle—coward! It's true I had promised mother to stay with her; but I'm sure I should have been coward enough to break my word at any time, if I hadn't been afraid of mixing with people: for the truth is I am afraid of people, chiefly because I think they see

what a wretched creature I am. But just because I *am* afraid of them I go and talk evil of them—confounded coward that I am! It's only out of cowardice that I make songs. I dare not think of my own affairs, so I go and dip in other folks'—and that's making poetry!

"I've had reason enough for weeping till the hills turned to lakes, yet I say to myself 'Hush, hush!' and rock myself to sleep. Why, even my songs are cowardly: if I had more pluck they'd be far better. I'm afraid of all bold thought: I fear everything that's strong; if I force myself to it, it's only when I'm in a passion,—and passion is mere weak cowardice. I'm cleverer, abler, wiser than I seem—I'm better than I appear from my talk—but yet, such is my cowardice, I dare not seem to be just what I am. Why, look here! that brandy yesterday I only drank from cowardice; I wanted to drown my thoughts! Ah, I was doing wrong, I knew; but I went on drinking and drinking—I drank my father's life-blood and my own wits away! Why, my cowardice is altogether without limits; and most cowardly of all is it that I can loll here and tell myself all this. Kill myself? Devil take me if I'm not too much of a coward for that! Besides, I believe in God—yes, I do believe in God—and I'd go to Him gladly enough too, but my cowardice keeps me from Him. Everything would be changed and different then, and that's just what a coward like me shudders away from. But suppose I tried—tried with all my might? Almighty God! suppose I were to try, I say, would'st Thou amend me in such way as my frail strength could endure? for there is neither bone nor sinew in me; all is as quavering jelly. But suppose I were to try—with good and gentle books (I fear all strong writings); with beautiful tales and legends, and all that is comforting; with a sermon every Sunday and a prayer every evening; and with regular, steady work, so that religion may find fitting soil;—for that it cannot in idleness. If I were to

try—dear gentle God of my childhood! let me try to come to thee!"

Someone opened the door, and dashed across to him;—it was his mother, her face pale as death, though it was bathed in perspiration. This was the second day of her search for her son. She had been crying his name aloud, and without waiting to listen for his answer, going on crying aloud and running about, till he called out to her from amid the hay on which he lay. Then she uttered one shrill scream, sprang upon the heap of hay, and folded him in her arms.

"Oh, Arne! Arne! are you here?" she sobbed. "Have I really found you at last? I have been looking for you ever since yesterday evening: I have been searching all night. My poor, poor Arne! I saw they had been treating you shamefully. I did so want to talk with you and console you!—Arne! I saw you were drinking too much! O God Almighty! may I never see that again!" It was long before she could go on again. "Jesus guard you, my son," she sobbed. "I saw you drinking! and then all of a sudden you had got away from me, all dazed with drink and worry as you were, and I ran about everywhere to find you: I went into every house; I ran far out into the fields; I peered into every ditch; I asked everybody I met; I came here too, but you did not answer my call. O Arne, Arne! I went along by the river, but it did not seem anywhere deep enough to——" And she pressed him closer to her.

"That made me feel calmer, and I thought you must surely have gone home, and I hurried back and got there in a quarter of an hour. I opened the doors and looked in every room, and not till then did I remember that I had the keys myself, so that you could not possibly have got in there. Arne! last night I searched every inch of the road on both sides; I did not dare to go and look at the precipice! I don't know why I came here again; there was no

one to help me, but somehow God put it into my mind that you must be here."

He tried to soothe her as best he could.

"Arne!" she burst out, "you'll never drink brandy again, will you?"

"No, you may be sure of that."

"They must have behaved badly to you—they *did* behave badly to you, didn't they?"

"Ah no! it was I who was a *coward*," replied he, laying stress on the last word.

"I don't understand why they should have treated you so unkindly. But what was it they did to you? You never will tell me anything." And she began to weep again.

"But you never tell me anything either," returned Arne in a gentle voice.

"Still, it's your fault most, Arne; I have grown so used to say nothing from your father's days, that I need you to help me a little to speak! Good God! there's only we two; and we have suffered so much together."

"Let us see if we cannot make things go better for the future," whispered he. "Next Sunday I'll read out the sermon to you."

"God bless you for that!" she murmured.

Presently she began again.

"Arne!"

"Yes."

"There is something I ought to tell you."

"Tell it me, mother."

"I am bearing a great sin for your sake: I have done a wicked thing."

"You, mother!" he cried. And it moved him so to think that his loving-hearted, ever-patient mother should reproach herself for having sinned against him, who never did anything really kind for her, that he threw his arms round her, kissed her, and burst into tears.

"Yes, I! and yet I couldn't help doing it."

"O mother, you've never done anything wrong against me, I know."

"Yes, I have: God knows it was only because I loved you so. But you will forgive me for it, won't you?"

"I'll forgive you, never fear."

"Well, let me ask you once more if you forgive me for it?"

"Yes, yes, mother."

"You see, that's really why it's been so hard for me to talk with you—I have had this sin against you on my mind."

"Good God! don't talk so, mother!"

"At any rate, I'm glad now that I've been able to tell you that much."

"Mother, we must talk together more, you and I."

"That we will—and you'll really read the sermon to me, won't you?"

"That I will."

'God bless you, my poor, poor Arne!"

"I think now we had better go home."

"Yes, home."

"Why do you look about you like that, mother?"

"It was in this very barn your father lay and wept."

"Father?" cried Arne, turning pale.

"Poor Nils! it was the day you were christened," said Margit. "Why do you look about you like that, Arne?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ELI.

FROM the day on which Arne had tried with all his heart to join his life more closely to his mother's, his views of other people began quite to alter. He looked at them now more with his mother's gentle eyes. But he often found it hard to remain true to his purpose; for the things that were most in his thoughts were quite beyond his mother's understanding. Here is a song he made about this time:

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow;
So out to the beech-grove I wended my way,
And myself on my back did I throw.
But the midge 'gan to sting, and the ant 'gan to creep,
And the gadfly buzzed out at me, 'Wake from thy sleep!'"

"Won't you go out this glorious day, dear?" said the mother, who sat singing by the threshold.

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow;
So I sang on the hill-side, as dreaming I lay,
Of fair maidens and days long ago.
But some serpents approached me, a good three ells long,
And chased me away from my meadow and song."

"It's such beautiful weather, one could go barefoot," said the mother; and she drew off her stockings.

*"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,*
*That the house seemed oppressive to grow;*
*I longed for a plunge in the cool of the bay,*
So far out on the fjord did I row.
But fiercely the sun came, my skin to attack:
And that was too much, so I rowed the boat back."

"Now, this is the sort of day for the hay to get dry in," said the mother; and she pushed a hay-rake deep into it.

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow;
To the depth of the greenwood, where venturesome ray
Ne'er pierces, I hopefully go.
But a worm from a tree tumbled down on my face:
'Fiend take you,' cried I, and I rushed from the place."

"Well, if the cow doesn't find plenty to eat to-day," said the mother, "she never will." And she glanced up towards the pasture.

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow;
I bathed in the waterfall's silvery spray,
'Now here can befall me no woe!'
Alas! I was drowned in the golden sunshine—
But if this is your song, it cannot be mine."

"Three such sunny days, and all the hay will be got safely in," said the mother. And away she went to make his bed.

Nevertheless, Arne's intercourse with his mother grew every day more and more of a comfort to her. The things she was unable to understand defined his relationship to her quite as well as the things she *did* understand; for just because she did not grasp them, he thought over her difficulties more and more; and she herself grew dearer to

him for his finding her boundaries in all directions. Yes, *she was very, very dear to him!*

*Arne had not cared much for stories when he was a boy, but now, as a young man, he was seized with a passion for* them, as well as for the national sagas and heroic songs. A strange longing possessed his soul. He went about alone much of his time now; and many a place he had never looked at before, now seemed to him marvellously fair. While he was being prepared for confirmation, he had often gone with his class fellows and played beside a great piece of water near the parsonage called, from its depth and darkness, the Black Lake. This water now began to come into his thoughts again, and one evening he wandered down to it.

He sat down behind some bushes close by the parsonage, which lay on the slope of a very steep hill that rose high behind it. The opposite shore was of the same shape, so that all sorts of strange shadowy forms were playing on the lake from both sides; but out in the middle was a broad shimmering band of silver water.

All was peace; the sun was beginning to set. There came the faint chime of bells from the opposite shore, and save that there was no sound; Arne did not look straight across. At first his eyes were fixed on the surface of the waters, for the sun just before sinking was shedding a deep red glow over them. There was a break in the mountains, making a long, low vale, in which the waters plashed; it looked as if the peaks were coming together again.

Homestead touched homestead in the valley beyond; the smoke rose up from them and curled away; the fields shone with verdant moisture, and boats laden with hay lay by the shore. He could see many folks moving about, but he heard no sound. His eye turned from them to the strand, from which rose naught save God's dark woods, through which, by the water's edge, the path of mankind

*was pointed out as by a finger, for all the way a winding streak of dust was plain to see. With his eye he followed* it till he reached the point just opposite to where he sat; there the wood ceased, the mountains broke, and farm upon farm filled the gap. There were red-painted houses, larger than those in the lower valley and with bigger windows, which just now were red too in the setting sun. The hills were all alight with bright rays: the smallest child at play there could be seen, distinct and plain; bright by the water's edge the sand shone white, children and dogs gleefully disporting themselves thereon. But suddenly all grew sun-forsaken and gloomy, the houses dusky-red, the herbage black green, the sand grey-white, the children little shapeless lumps. A mist had sprung up over the mountain side and shut out the face of the sun. But Arne looked down into the waters, and found all the scene pictured there again. The smiling corn-fields waved before him, the woods stept silently into his view. There stood the dwelling-houses gazing calmly down, with doors open, and children passing in and out. Mystic fancies, strange memories of childhood circled round him like fish around the bait; away they darted, back they ventured again, to and fro they sported, but never did they let themselves be caught.

"Let us sit down here till your mother comes; the pastor's lady must get down some time or other, after all."

Arne started up; somebody had plainly seated himself right behind him.

"Oh! I would so like to stay just this one night more," said a supplicating, tearful voice—a voice evidently belonging to a young girl not quite grown up yet.

"Now, don't cry any more," answered the gentle but deliberate voice of a man; "it's not nice of you to keep crying because you're to go home to your mother."

*"That's not why I'm crying."*

*"Why are you crying, then?"*

*"Because I can't be with Mathilde any more."*

(This was the name of the pastor's only daughter. Arne called to mind now that a young country girl had been brought up along with her.)

"Well, that couldn't go on for ever, you know."

"Yes; but only just one day more!" And her sobs burst forth again.

"It's best for you to come back home with us now; perhaps, as it is, it's too late."

"Too late! what do you mean? Did ever girl hear the like?"

"You were born a country girl, and a country girl you must remain; we're not the sort of people to have a fine lady."

"I could have kept on being a country girl, however much I stayed there."

"You can't judge of that."

"I've always worn country girl's clothes."

"That's not what makes a country girl."

"I've spun, too, and woven, and cooked."

"That's not it, either."

"I can talk just as you and mother do."

"Nor is that it, either."

"Well, then, I don't rightly know *what* it is!" said the girl; and she laughed.

"We shall see," replied the other. "One thing I'm afraid of is that you've got too many ideas in your head already."

"Ideas, ideas! that's what you're always saying. I haven't got a single one, I tell you." And she fell a weeping again.

"Little weathercock that you are!" ejaculated the man.

"Weathercock, indeed! The pastor never called me that."

"Well, then, *I* do."

"Weathercock, weathercock! did ever girl hear the like? I won't be called weathercock, I tell you!"

"Well, what will you be called, then?"

"What will I be called! Oh dear, there's a thing to say! I'll be called nothing."

"Very well; let's call you 'Nothing,' then."

At this the girl began to laugh; but a moment after she said, quite gravely:

"It's horrid of you to call me 'Nothing.'"

"Good heavens! didn't you ask me yourself?"

"No; I will not be 'Nothing.'"

"Very well, dear; be 'Everything.'"

Again the girl began to laugh; then immediately, with reproachful voice, she said:

"The pastor never used to fool me like that."

"No, he was content with making you a fool."

"The pastor did! Why, you've never been so kind to me as he was!"

"It would have been too bad if I had."

"Oh yes! sour milk can ne'er get sweet."

"Yes it can, if it's cooked to whey."

At this her laughter burst forth.

"There comes your mother," said he.

Straightway she was all gloom again.

"Such a chattering creature as that pastor's wife I've never met all my born days," came from a quick, sharp, strident voice. "Hurry up now, Baard; get up and push off the boat; we shan't be home to-night. She kept telling me I was to take care Eli always kept her feet dry—why, she can take care of that herself, I suppose! She's to go for a walk every morning, she says, because of her delicate health. 'Delicate health' here and 'delicate health'

there it was with her, I can tell you. But get up, Baard, do, and push off the boat—why, I've got bread-baking to look after this evening yet."

"The box hasn't come yet," answered the man, without stirring.

"The box isn't going to come; it's to stay there till next Sunday. And you, Eli! don't you hear? Get up, I say; pick up your bundle and come along. Come, get up Baard, do!"

She moved away, the girl following, the woman's "get up, and come, do!" still coming from the distance.

"Have you seen to the plug in the boat?" asked Baard, without moving.

"Yes, it's in all right;" and Arne heard her immediately knock it in with a baler. "But get up do, Baard! we are not to stop here all night, are we?"

"I'm waiting for the box."

"Bless me! haven't I told you it's to stay here till next Sunday?"

"Here it comes," said Baard. And they heard the rattle of wheels.

"Why, I told them," said the woman, "it was to stay over till Sunday."

"And I said it was to come with us."

The woman, without a word, went straight up to the cart, took out of it a bundle, a lunch-bag, and some small things, and bore them off to the boat. Then Baard raised himself, went to the cart, and carried the box down unaided.

But following the cart came running a girl in a straw hat, her hair fluttering about her: it was the pastor's daughter.

"Eli! Eli!" she cried from the distance.

"Mathilde! Mathilde!" came the answer, as Eli dashed up to meet her.

They met on the hill-side, weeping in each other's embrace. Presently Mathilde took up something she had set down on the grass: it was a bird-cage.

"You are to have Narrifas—you must take him. Mother wants you to, too. Yes, you *must* take Narrifas after all, and then you'll often think of me—and often, very often, row across to me here." And at that both fell a-crying again.

"Eli! Come, come, Eli! Don't stick there!" came a summons from below.

"I'll come with you, that I will," said Mathilde; "I'll go across with you and sleep with you to-night."

"Yes, yes, yes!" And with arms round one another's necks, down they went to the landing-place. A moment after, and Arne saw the boat out in the water, Eli standing up in the stern, holding the bird-cage, and waving her hand to Mathilde, who was sitting on a stone by the landing-stage, bitterly weeping. She sat there as long as the boat was in sight on the water: it was not far across to the red houses, and Arne remained in his place. His eyes followed the boat as her's did. Presently it was on the black strip of water in the shadows, and he watched it draw near to the land. He could see the three forms mirrored in the water, and thus he followed them all along the houses, till they came to the best of them all. He saw the mother go in first, then the father with the chest, and lastly the daughter, for he could distinguish them by their different statures. Presently the daughter came out again and sat down by the granary door, most likely to get a last glimpse of the other side, as the sun lit it up with his last rays. But the pastor's daughter was gone, and there was no one there but Arne, who sat there looking at her image in the water. "Perhaps she sees me now," was in his heart.

He rose at last, and went. The sun had set, but the

heavens were blue and clear as they only are sometimes on summer nights. Clouds of vapour arose from land and water on both sides of the mountains; but the peaks stood free and unembarrassed as they looked at one another. He turned up the hill-side; the water grew blacker and deeper and denser in his eyes. The valley below grew narrower, and seemed to be getting closer to the water's edge; the mountain peaks seemed nearer together, making more of a solid mass than when shone on and parted by the bright sun-rays. The heavens themselves came nearer to earth, and all things were in amity and repose.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A NUTTING PARTY.

HIS fancy now began to play with dreams of love and fair maidens; his old ballads and romances made him behold them in a mystic mirror, like the young girl he had seen mirrored in the water. He was for ever looking into it, and from that night the fancy took him to sing of it too; for now love had come, so to speak, nearer to him. But his thoughts sped away from him, and came back with a song that seemed to him all unknown; it was as if someone else had composed it for him:

"Fair Venevil hastened, with light-tripping feet,
Her lover to greet.
She sang till the air bore the echo away,
'Good day, and good day!'
And all the small singing-birds twittered this lay:
'On St. Hans' eve,
All their toil will leave,
Who knows if she then may her bridal wreath weave?'

"She weaves him a garland of blossoms blue,
'Of my eyes the hue!'
He glanced at them, dropped them, then took the flowers gay.
'Fair maiden, good day!'
He left her, and sang as he went on his way:
'On St. Hans' eve,
All their toil will leave,
Who knows if she then may her bridal wreath weave?'

"She weaves him another. 'Ah, think it fair!
'Tis my golden hair.'
Then she coaxing raised, as the words she said,
Her mouth so red:
He kissed it, and blushed, and away he sped.

"She wove one, white as a lily band.
'See! 'tis my right hand!'
And one, blood-red as love's agony.
''Tis the left, for thee:'
He took them both, but away turned he.

"But still would the maiden her garlands bind—
''Tis all I can find!'
While over her flowerets fell many a tear,
'Take all that is here!'
He took them in silence, and fled as in fear.

"She wove one, pure as the pale moon's ray,
'For my bridal day!'
She wove till the blood left her fingers fair,
'Now love, deck my hair!'
But ah! when she sought him no lover was there.

"She wove and she tarried not, day or night,
At her bride-wreath white.
Summer, and flowers, and St. Hans' day,
All have passed away.
Still in dreams she is weaving her garland gay.
'On St. Hans' eve,
All their toil will leave,
Who knows if she then may her bridal-wreath weave?'"

* * * *

It was the gloom of his heart that clothed the first vision of love that came upon his soul, in such sad lines. Two heart's-desires—the yearning to have someone to love, and the longing to do some great thing—sprang up together in his soul, and melted into one. It was now that he began to work again at the song "Over the mountains high"—ever altering it, singing it over to himself, and thinking each time "It'll yet carry me off some time or another: I'll go on singing it till I pluck up courage

enough." He did not, however, forget his mother in his thoughts of travel; but he consoled himself with the thought that he would send for her as soon as he had got a footing abroad, and could offer her a life such as he never could hope to get, either for himself or for her, at home. But in the midst of his great yearnings there played around him something serene, yet bright and tender, that seemed to dart hither and thither, lay hold of him, and anon fly off again; so that, dreamer as he had now become, he was more thoroughly in the power of involuntary fancies than he himself knew.

There was in the parish a merry old fellow of the name of Ejnar Aasen; he had broken his leg when twenty years of age, and since that time walked with a crutch, but wherever he appeared limping along on his crutch, there was always some merriment forward. The man was well to do; there was a great nut-copse on his land, and it was a regular thing for a troop of merry girls to come together at his house, on one of the finest days in autumn, to go a-nutting. They were grandly entertained by him in the day-time, and there was dancing for them at night. To most of them he had stood sponsor—for he stood sponsor to half the parish—all children called him "Godfather," and young and old alike followed their example.

Now Godfather and Arne were well acquainted, and the man liked the lad for his songs, so he invited him to join them in the nutting party. Arne blushed and refused. "He was not used to being among women," he said.

"Better get used to it now, then," answered Godfather.

Arne could not sleep of a night for thinking of it; fear and longing were at strife within him. However, in the long-run he not only went, but, what is more, was in fact the only young man among all these girls. He could not deny that he felt a sense of disillusion; these were not

the maidens of whom he had made songs, nor yet were they those he had feared to encounter. They were more full of life than anything he had ever seen, and the first thing which struck him was that they could make merry over anything in the world; and if three of them had anything to laugh at, incontinently five fell a-laughing just because the three laughed. They behaved, too, as if they all shared one another's daily life; yet there were some there who had never met till that day. If they got hold of the branch they sprang up at they laughed, and if they missed it they laughed too. They struggled for the nutting-hook to catch the branches with. Those who got it laughed; those who failed to get it laughed too. Godfather hopped after them with his crutch, and teased them as much as he could. Those he caught, laughed because he caught them; those he failed to catch, laughed because he failed to catch them. And all of them laughed at Arne because he was serious-looking, so that he could not help laughing; and that made them laugh at him because he laughed himself at last.

They seated themselves finally on a large knoll—Godfather in the midst, and all the girls about him. There was a wide expanse around them, and the sun was burning hot; but the girls cared little for that, as they pelted one another with shells and husks, and gave Godfather the kernels. Godfather kept ordering them to be still, and striking out at them as far as he could reach with his crutch; for now he wanted them to begin telling tales, and merry ones, if possible. But to get them to tell stories seemed harder than to stop a runaway cart going down hill. Godfather began, but many of them would not listen, for they knew his tales from of old, they said; but gradually they were all earnestly listening, and before they knew they were sitting there, telling the best they could. And what astonished Arne most was that their stories

were now as serious as, before, their merriment had been noisy. Most of them ran on love.

"Now then, Aasa, you've got a good one, I remember, from last year," said godfather, turning to a healthy, good-natured-looking, round-faced lass, who sat with her little sister's head on her lap, plaiting her hair.

"I expect lots of them know that," she answered.

"Let's have it, all the same." they urged.

"Well, I won't wait to be pressed, then," said she; and straightway she began her story, plaiting her sister's hair all the while she told it.

"Once upon a time there was a young man, who used to go tending the cattle: he liked to drive them up to a certain broad river. A bit further along there was a crag, which jutted out so far over the stream that he could make himself heard from it on the other side. Now, over on that other side was a girl tending her flocks; he could see her all day long, but he never could get over to her. Day after day he questioned her:

"'Who art thou, O maid, by the river sitting,
Blowing the horn, and for ever knitting?'

Till at last he got for answer:

"'My name it swims, like the gull on the sea.
O, lad with the fur cap, come over to me.'

"At this the boy was just as wise as he was before; so he thought he wouldn't trouble about her any more. But this wasn't so easy to do, for let him drive his herd wherever he pleased, it was sure to lead him somehow or other back to the crag again. So at last the lad grew frightened, and he shouted at her:

"'How call they thy father, and where dost thou dwell?
Ne'er in church have I seen thee. Fair maiden, then tell.'

For the fact is, the lad began half to believe that she was a troll.

> "'O, drowned is my father, my house it is burnt,
> And the way to the church have I never yet learnt.'

"But this, too, left the lad as wise as he was before. He spent all his days now at the crag, and at night he dreamt that she danced round him, lashing out at him with a great cow-whip whenever he tried to reach her. At last he could not sleep by night or work by day, so that he fell into a wretched condition.

> "'If thou art a fairy, then far from me flee;
> But if mortal maiden, then answer to me.'

"Yet she made no answer, so now he felt certain she was a troll. He gave up tending the cattle, but that did him no good, for wherever he was, and whatever he was doing, his thoughts were always of the beautiful troll playing on the horn.

"Well, one day, as he was standing chopping up wood, there came through the yard a young girl who was the very image of the troll; but when she came nearer, he saw it was not she. He was still thinking of this when the girl came back again, and, at a distance, she was so exactly like the troll, that he ran up to her at once. But when he came near it was not she, all the same.

"After this, wherever the lad went—to church, to a dance, or to any gathering of any sort—he always saw this girl. Some way off from him she seemed his troll exactly, but close at hand she was different; so at last he asked her if it was she or not, but she only laughed at him. 'Well, well,' thought the lad, 'I may as well jump in as slip in,' so he went and married the girl.

"Well, when he had done this, he no longer liked the girl. When away from her he was always longing for her,

but when he was with her he was always yearning for one whom he could not see, so that the lad did not treat his wife kindly; but she bore with him in patient silence.

"But one day, as he was going after some horses, his way took him to the crag, and he sat down there and sang:

"'Like moonlight far over the cliffs dost thou play,
And like Will-o'-the-Wisp shines thy far-distant ray.'

"It seemed to him good to sit there, and from that time he often went to the crag when he was discontented with home. But each time, when he had gone out, his wife fell a-weeping. One day, as he sat there, there, on the other side, before his very eyes, sat the troll, blowing her horn.

"'Ah! there thou art, fair one! oh blow once again,
While lonely I listen, and weep in my pain.'

Then she answered:

"'Till the dreams have gone out of your head I will blow,
For at home the corn ripens, and home you must go.'

"At this, the lad grew frightened, and went back to his home. But, before very long, he grew so tired of his wife again, that he couldn't help going to the crag over the river in the wood. Then he heard singing:

"'I dreamed that thou camest; now hasten to find me;
But if thou wouldst do so, then look well behind thee.'

"The lad started up and looked around him: the end of a green skirt twinkled away among the bushes. After it dashed he: then followed a chase through the wood. Fleet of foot as the troll no human being could be. He cast spells at her time after time, but she ran on just as well as before. But at last she began to grow weary, as the lad could see from the way she ran; he could see, too, more and more clearly, from his view of her figure, that she was his troll, and no other.

"'Now you shall certainly be mine,' thought the lad, and suddenly he dashed at her so impetuously that both he and the troll fell, and rolled far down the hill together before they could stop themselves.

"Then the troll laughed, so that it seemed to the lad the mountains sang again. He clasped her to his heart, and she was beautiful as he had wished his own wife to be.

'"Who art thou, oh beauteous maid?' asked the lad, and he touched her soft, warm cheeks.

"'Dear heart,' answered the troll, "I am only your own wife!'"

The girls laughed and made merry over the lad's folly. Godfather turned to Arne, and asked him if he had been listening carefully.

"Well now, *I'll* tell you something," cried a little lass, with a little round face and a little round nose.

"There was once a little fellow who wanted very much to make love to a little girl; they were both quite old enough, but they were both such little things that the boy could never pluck up courage enough to begin. He kept close to her at church-time, but never could get to talk to her of anything but the weather. He followed her about at dances, and almost danced her to death; yet he could not manage to talk to her.

"'You must learn to write,' said he to himself, at last, 'so you'll not need to say it;' and off he went, to learn writing.

"However, he thought he would never be able to write well enough, so that he was a whole year before he ventured to write the letter. Then it was necessary to get it given her without anyone seeing it. So one day, as they happened to be alone together behind the church, the lad said:

"'I've got a letter for you.'

"'But,' answered the girl, 'I can't read writing.'

"So there was he at a standstill again.

"Well, the lad went into her father's service, and never let her be out of his sight all day long. Once he had very nearly managed to ask her: he had just got his mouth open, when in flew a great fly.

"'Suppose someone were to come and take her from me!' thought he; but nobody came and took her from him, because she was so little.

"At last, however, somebody *did* come, and he was little too. The lad saw at once what the new comer meant, so, when they went into the shed together, the lad ran and placed himself at the key-hole. Then the stranger inside began to make love to her.

"'Oh!' groaned the lad to himself, 'what a noodle I must have been, not to have been quicker about it myself.'

"Then the wooer inside kissed the girl on the lips.

"'Ah, that tasted nice, I daresay,' snarled the lad to himself.

"Then the lover inside took the girl on his knee.

"'O, what a wicked world we live in!' moaned the lad, and he burst out crying.

"The girl heard the noise and went to the door.

"'What is it you want of me, horrid boy, that I never can get a moment's peace because of you?'

"'I want? I only wanted to ask to be your best man.'

"'No; that one of my brothers shall be,' answered the girl, and she slammed the door.

"And there stood the boy, alone again."

The girls laughed loudly at this tale, and began to pelt each other promptly with nutshells again.

Godfather wanted Eli Böen to tell them something now.

"Yes, but what was it to be?" she asked.

Why, let her tell them what she had told him, last

time he was over the hills at her people's house, when she gave him the new garters.

It was long before Eli could begin, because she was laughing so; but at last she said:

"A boy and a girl were once walking together along a road.

"'Look at that thrush following us,' said the girl.

"'Following me, you mean,' said the boy.

"'Just as likely me as you,' answered the girl.

"'That's easy to see,' retorted the boy; 'you go by the upper road and I'll go by the lower, and we'll meet up there at the end.'

"They did as he said.

"'Well,' said the boy, when they met again, 'it followed me, you see.'

"'Why, it followed me,' answered the girl.

"'There must be two of them,' said he.

"They walked on together again for a while, but there was only one bird now. The boy felt sure it was flying along on his side, but the girl was just as positive it was on hers.

"'I don't care a pin for the old thrush,' said the boy, at last.

"'Nor do I, then,' answered the girl.

"But no sooner had they said this, than the thrush disappeared.

"'It was on *your* side, after all,' said the boy.

"'No, thank you. I saw plainly enough it was on yours,' retorted she. 'But look; here he is come again,' she cried.

"'Yes, so he is. Well, he's on my side now, at any rate,' shouted the boy.

"'I'd rather do anything than walk along with a horrid thing like you!' And she went her own way.

"At this, the thrush flew away from the boy; and he

found it so lonely being by himself, that he began to call her name.

"She answered.

"'Is the thrush with you?' shouted the boy.

"'No; but is he with you?'

"'No, no. Why don't you come back here; then perhaps he'll come, too.'

"So the girl came back, and they took one another's hands and walked along together.

"'Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet!' came from the girl's side of the way.

"'Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet!' came from the boy's side.

"'Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet!' came from all sides; and when they looked to see where it came from, they saw a hundred thousand million thrushes round them.

"'Oh, how lovely!' cried the girl, and she looked at the boy.

"'God bless you, dear!' said he, and patted her cheeks."

This story delighted all the girls.

Then Godfather thought it would be nice for them to tell what they had last dreamt, and he would judge which of them had had the best dream.

"What! tell what they had dreamt!" cried they. "No, indeed!" And they all began to laugh and whisper. But gradually one girl after another began to declare that she had had such a strange dream the night before.

"Ah," said some other, "but it couldn't have been so wonderful as mine was."

And at last, all of them were anxious to be telling their dreams.

"But not aloud," they all stipulated; "only to some one person; and that person must certainly not be Godfather."

Arne was sitting silent on a knoll a little way off, and they decided they would trust their dreams to him. He was sitting in the shade of a hazel-bush when the girl who had told the first story came up to him. She considered for a while and then began:

"I dreamt I was standing by a great sheet of water. Then I saw someone moving over the water, and that was one whose name I will not say. He got up on the cup of a great water-lily, and there he sat, singing. Now I went and stood on one of the great lily-leaves that lie swimming on the water; I wanted to row over to him on it. But as soon as I got on the leaf, it began to sink with me, and I was so frightened, that I burst out crying. Then he came rowing up in the lily-cup, lifted me up into it, and away we rowed, right across the water. Wasn't that a beautiful dream?"

Next came the little girl who had told the tale about the little people.

"I dreamed I had caught a little bird, and I was so glad. I didn't mean to let it go till I had got it home; but when I got there, I didn't dare to let it go either, for fear father and mother might bid me let it out again. So I went up to the garret with it; but there was the cat lurking about after it, so that I couldn't let it go there either. Then I didn't know what to do, so I went to the barn; but, oh dear! there were so many chinks, that it would easily have flown through them. So I went away with it, down to the farm-yard, and there (I thought) there was standing someone whose name I will not say. He stood playing with a big, big dog.

"'I would rather play with your bird,' said he, and he came quite near.

"But now (I thought) I suddenly dashed away, and the big dog after me, and away we went round the yard; but mother quickly opened the door, pulled me in, and shut it

*to again. Outside stood he, laughing, with his face against the window-pane.*

"'Look, here's your bird!' he cried. And fancy, he actually had it.

"Wasn't that a funny dream?"

Next came the girl who had told the thrush story. "Eli" the others called her. It was this Eli whom he had seen that evening in the boat, and mirrored in the lake. She was just the same as then, and yet not the same, so maidenly and handsome did she look now with her thoughtful face and slender figure, as she took her place. She was laughing very much, and therefore it was long before she could manage to speak. At last she began:

"I had been so enjoying the thought of coming here nutting to-day that last night I dreamt I was sitting here on the hill. The sun was shining, and I had my lap all full of nuts. But a little squirrel had got in all among my nuts, and he sat up and ate them all. Wasn't that a funny dream?"

And now, when many dreams had been told him, he had to say which was the best. He wanted time to think, he said; so, meantime, Godfather, with all his troop, made his way to the homestead, whither Arne was to follow them. They darted down the hill, and arranged themselves in ranks when they had got on to level ground, marching back to the house singing.

Arne, left sitting on the knoll, heard their singing. The sun's rays were falling on the merry band, and their white sleeves glistened in the distance. Away they danced over the meadows, with Godfather after, threatening them with his stick for treading down the grass. Arne was no longer thinking of dreams, nor did his eyes long follow the young girls: his fancies were spreading over the dale like bright sun-threads, and he sat upon the hill-side, weaving them together. Before he was conscious of it, he was

*caught in a web of sad longings: there was a yearning in his heart to be gone, such as never had been there in his life before. He vowed to tell his mother of his intent as* soon as he got home again, come of it what would.

These thoughts grew upon him every minute, and drove him to his old song, "Over the mountains high." Never had the words come so easily to him before, nor ranged themselves so fairly to his desire; they seemed to him like maidens sitting together on a hill. He drew forth a scrap of paper and wrote on it, on his knee. And when he had written his song through to the end, up he rose, as if freed from a burden. He had no wish to go back to the rest; he began to make his way homewards through the woods, though he knew he would need to be walking the whole night.

The first time he sat down to rest on the way, he thought he would take out the song, and sing it to himself all through the woods; but he found he had left it, forgotten, on the spot where he made it.

One of the girls came to seek him at the knoll; she found—not him, but the song.

## CHAPTER X.

### AT BÖEN.

TO "have a talk with mother" was a thing easier to say than to do. He alluded casually to Kristen, and the letters which never came; but at that his mother left the room, and for days afterwards he thought her eyes were red. He perceived, too, another sign of her state of mind, and that was that she got especially nice meals for him.

One day he had to go to the forest, to cut down some wood; his way ran through the thickets, and the very spot where he was to begin his hewing was a place frequented in autumn-time for its wortleberries. Arne had put down his axe to take off his jacket, and was just about to begin, when two girls came along with berry-pails. It was always his way to hide himself rather than encounter a girl, so that was what he did now.

"O, I say! I say!" he heard, "just look at all the berries! Eli, Eli!"

"Yes, dear, yes—I see."

"But don't let's go any further; there are any number of pailfuls here."

"I thought I heard a rustle in the thicket there."

"O you silly!" said the other; and each girl clasped the

other nervously round the waist, and for a while they stood so still as scarcely to draw breath.

"Oh, it's nothing, after all," said one at length, "let's go on picking."

"Yes, yes, let's go on then," said the other, and they began again to fill their pails.

"It *was* nice of you, Eli, to come over to the parsonage to-day. Now—haven't you something to tell me?"

"I've been at Godfather's——"

"Yes, yes; you told me that; but is there nothing about—you know whom?"

"Ah, yes!"

"Oh Eli! really, really? Do be quick and tell me, dear."

"He's been again!"

"What, really?"

"Yes, really. Both father and mother made as if they didn't notice anything; but I ran up to the garret and hid myself."

"Go on, go on. Did he follow you?"

"I think father must have told him where I was; he's always so horrid now."

"So he came after you, then? Here, sit down, sit down by me—now; he came up, you say?"

"Yes, but he did'nt say much, he was so shy."

"Tell me every word he said, anyhow; every word."

"'Are you afraid of me?' said he. 'Why should I be afraid of you?' said I. 'You know what it is I want of you,' said he, and seated himself on the chest beside me."

"Beside you!"

"And then he put his arm round my waist——"

"Round your waist! are you mad?"

"I tried to get away again, but he wouldn't let me go. 'Dear Eli,' said he"—and she laughed, and the other girl laughed too.

"Well? well?—what then?"

"Will you be my wife?" said he.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed her hearer.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Eli.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed they both.

At last, however, even the girls' laughter could not but come to an end, and then for a while there was perfect silence, after which came a question in a low voice.

"But Eli, tell me—wasn't it—wasn't it horrid, when he put his arm round you?"

The other either made no answer to this, or else it was in so low a tone that it could not be overheard; perhaps it was only a smile. Presently the first speaker began again.

"Didn't your father or your mother say anything to you about it afterwards?"

"Father came up and looked at me, but I hid myself directly, for he laughed as soon as he saw me."

"And your mother?"

"She said nothing, but she's not been so severe as usual."

"You refused him, I suppose?"

"Of course."

Then there was silence again for a time.

"I say?"

"Well?"

"Do you think anyone will ever come to me like that?"

"Yes, of course."

"Are you really in earnest? O—O—Eli—suppose he were to take *me* by the waist!" And she hid her face.

Presently they were laughing, chattering, and whispering together, and before long they departed: they had neither of them seen Arne, or his axe or jacket, of which he was very glad.

Some days after, he took Upland Knut to work and live at Kampen.

"You shall no longer be alone," said Arne.

Arne himself was now at work with a purpose. He had early learnt how to handle a saw, for he had done much to the house at Kampen. Now he wanted to practise carpentry as a trade, knowing it was best to have a regular handicraft, and he knew, too, that it was good for him to mix with other people; and such was the alteration that had gradually taken place in him, that he now felt himself longing for companionship whenever he had been for a while all alone. It happened that that winter he was at the parsonage, with his axe and saw, and both the girls were often together there too. Arne wondered, when he saw them, who on earth it was that was wooing Eli Böen.

It happened one day that he was to take the pastor's daughter and Eli for a drive; he had sharp ears, but for all that, he could not hear what they were talking of. Now and again Mathilde spoke a word to him, and then Eli would laugh, and turn away her face. Once Mathilde asked him if it was true that he wrote verses. "No," said he, shortly; and then both girls began to laugh, chatter, and giggle. After this, Arne did not seem best pleased with them, and behaved as if he did not see them.

Once he was sitting in the servants' room, when there was dancing going on, and Mathilde and Eli had both come down to look on. They were evidently discussing something in the corner, something which Eli did not want, it seemed, but Mathilde did; and the latter had her way. So up they both came to where he sat, bowed, and asked if he could dance. He said he could not, and at this both turned, laughed, and fled. "That's a nice way to laugh," thought Arne, and he grew grave. But the pastor had a little foster-son, ten or twelve years old, whom Arne was very fond of; now from this boy Arne learned to dance, when no one else was by to see.

Eli had a little brother, the same age as the pastor's foster-son. These two were playmates, and Arne made

sledges, snow-shoes, and bird-snares for them, while he talked with them much of their sisters, especially of Eli. One day, Eli's brother brought him word that he was not to be so untidy and careless about his hair.

"Who said that?" he asked.

"Eli did; but I was not to tell that she said it."

Some days after, he sent word that Eli was to laugh a little less. The boy came back again, with the message that Arne was to laugh a little more.

One day, the boy wanted to have something he had written. Arne let him do so, and thought no more about it. A little while later, the boy tried to gladden Arne with the tidings that both the girls liked his writing very much.

"Have they seen it then?"

"Yes; it was for them that I wanted it."

Arne told the boys to bring him something that their sisters had written, and they did so. Arne corrected their writing with a carpenter's pencil, and bade the boys put it where it would be easy for them to find it. Later on, he found the paper in his jacket pocket again, and, written at the foot of it, the words "Corrected by a conceited goose."

Next day, Arne finished his work at the parsonage and went home. His mother had never found him so gentle as he was this winter, since that sorrowful time that followed his father's death. He read the sermon to her, he went to church with her, and was kind to her in every way. But she knew right well all the while that this was only to gain her consent to his leaving her, to travel, when spring came. Meanwhile, one day, a messenger came from Böen, to ask him if he would go over there for some carpentry-work.

Arne was thrown into confusion, and answered "Yes," apparently without thinking the matter over. As soon as the man had gone, however, the mother said:

"You may well be dumbfoundered. From Böen!"

"Is that so wonderful, then?" asked Arne, without looking at her.

"From Böen!" cried Margit again.

"Well, why not, as well as from any other farm?" said he, looking up a bit.

"From Böen and Birgit Böen! from Baard, who maimed your father, and all for Birgit's sake!"

"What's that you say?" cried the boy. "Was it Baard Böen who did that?"

Son and mother stood up facing one another. A whole lifetime swept before their eyes, and for an instant they saw the black thread that was woven through it from beginning to end. Presently they began to talk of the days of Nils' glory, when old Eli Böen herself sought him for her daughter Birgit, and got a refusal. They went on talking till they got to where Nils was struck down, and both found out that Baard's guilt in the matter had been very little; but nevertheless it was he and none other that had made Arne's father a cripple.

"Am I never to be finished with father?" thought Arne, and at once made up his mind to go.

When Arne walked across to Böen, his saw over his shoulder, what seemed to him a fine homestead. The house looked as if it had been new-painted all over: he was feeling cold, and perhaps that was why it looked so cosy and pleasant to him. Instead of going straight in, he went round by the farm-yard. There was a herd of shaggy-haired goats nibbling about in the snow at some birch boughs; a sheep-dog was running backwards and forwards in front of the barn, barking as if the fiend had come into the yard, but as soon as Arne halted he began to wag his tail, and let himself be stroked. The kitchen door on the other side of the house opened every now and again, and each time Arne looked in, but saw only the milk-maid

with her pails, or the cook throwing out something to the goats. From the barn came the sound of lusty threshing. On the left of him, by a pile of logs, stood a lad chopping up wood, and behind him were sundry wood-heaps.

Arne put down his saw, and went into the kitchen. The floor was all covered with white sand, and tiny shavings of juniper; along the walls shone brightly-polished copper cooking utensils, and in the racks were rows of china. Dinner was being cooked. Arne asked if he could speak to Baard. "Go into the parlour," answered a maid, pointing. He went. He noticed that there was no latch to the door, but a handle of brass instead. The room was clean and well-painted, the ceiling ornamented with roses; the presses coloured red, with their owner's name in black letters, and the bedstead to match, but with the addition of blue stripes round the edges. By the fireplace sat a broad-shouldered man, with a kind face and long yellow hair; he was fitting hoops on some tubs. At the end of the long table sat a woman with a linen hood on her head; she wore closely-fitting clothes, and was tall and slender; she was busy dividing a heap of grain into two portions. These were the only people in the room.

"Good day, and God speed your work!" said Arne, taking off his cap.

Both looked up. The man smiled, and asked who he was.

"The man about the carpentry."

The man smiled still more, nodding his head, and beginning his work again. "Ah! Arne Kampen."

"Arne Kampen?" cried the woman, her eyes fixed on him. The man looked up quickly, with another smile. "Son of Nils Skrædder," he said, and settled down to his work again.

Next minute the woman had risen, gone to a shelf, turned round, moved back to a cupboard, turned back

again, bending down as if groping for something in a drawer, and asked, without looking up:

"Is he to work here?"

"Yes," said the man, without looking up either. "You haven't been asked to take a seat, I'm afraid," he went on, turning to Arne.

Arne sat down on a bench. The woman left the room, the man went on with his work. Arne asked if he might begin work too. "We'll have dinner first," was the answer.

The woman did not return, but next time the kitchen door opened it was Eli who came in. At first she made as if she did not see him. He got up to meet her, and she turned half round as she gave him her hand, without letting her eyes meet his. They exchanged a few words, while the father went on working. Eli's hair was in plaits now; she wore a bodice with tight-fitting sleeves, her figure was slender and graceful, her wrists prettily curved, and her hands small.

She began to lay the table. The labourers took their dinner in the other room, but Arne and the household had theirs in the parlour. It happened that particular day that they dined alone, but generally they all sat at the same table in the big light kitchen.

"Isn't your mother coming?" asked the man.

"No; she is in the garret, weighing out wool."

"Have you asked her?"

"Yes; but she says she doesn't want anything to eat."

For a moment there was silence, and then the man said:

"It must be cold up in the garret."

"She wouldn't let me light the fire," answered Eli.

After dinner Arne began his work; in the evening he sat with the others again. The woman was with them too; she and her daughter were sewing, the man was employed in mending various little things, and Arne

helped. For awhile there was perfect stillness, and Eli, whose wont it seemed to be to lead the talk, was now quite silent. It struck Arne, with a sort of dread, that it was often so in his own home; but now, for the first time, it seemed to him oppressive. At last Eli drew a deep breath, as if she had held in long enough, and began to laugh. Then the father began to laugh too, and Arne, somehow, felt in a laughing mood, and joined in as well. Then they began to talk of all sorts of things. By degrees he and Eli had most of the conversation to themselves, the father putting in a word here and there. But once, after Arne had been speaking at some length, he chanced to look up; his eye met Birgit the mother's eyes; she had let fall her work, and sat gazing fixedly at him. She plied her needle again at once, but as soon as he began to speak again she looked up.

Bed-time drew near, and they all went to their rooms. Arne particularly wanted to note what dream he would have the first night in a new place; but there was no sense in it at all. The whole day he had talked very little, or not at all, with the master of the house; yet all night it was only of him that he dreamt. Just before waking, it seemed to him that Baard was sitting at cards with Nils Skrædder, who was very angry and pale; but Baard was smiling, and drawing all the cards over to his side.

Arne was there for several days, during which there was almost nothing said, but a great deal done. Not only the family in the parlour, but the servants, the labourers, and even the maids scarcely spoke. There was an old dog in the yard, who barked whenever a stranger approached; but no one in the place ever heard the dog baying without a prompt "Lie down, sir!" at which the old hound returned, grumbling, to his kennel. At Kampen there was a great weathercock on the roof, that turned with every breath of wind; here at Böen was a still larger one, which attracted

Arne's attention at once, because it never moved. When the wind drove against it, it tried with all its might to get free, and Arne watched it so long that at last he could not keep himself from getting up on the roof and loosening it.

It was not frozen tight, as he had thought, but a peg was run through it to keep it from turning. Arne drew it out and threw it down; it struck Baard, who happened to be passing. He looked up, with a "What are you doing there?"

"Loosening the weathercock."

"Don't do that; it squeaks when it turns."

"That's better," said Arne, as he sat astride the ridge of the roof—"that's better than making no sound at all."

Baard looked up at Arne, and Arne looked down at Baard; then Baard smiled.

"He that can't help squeaking when he speaks," he said, "had best hold his tongue altogether, I should think."

Now it may happen that a remark haunts you long after it has been made, and especially when it is the last you have heard. These words repeated themselves to Arne as he climbed down in the cold from the roof, and they were with him still when he came into the parlour that evening. Eli was standing by the window in the evening twilight, looking out over the ice that lay shining in the rays of the moon. He went to the other window, and looked out too. Inside, all was comfortable warmth and stillness; outside, all was cold. The keen night wind, sweeping through the valley, was shaking the trees, so that the shadows they cast in the moonshine crept hither and thither across the snow. From the parsonage on the other side shone out a bright light, that seemed to keep dilating and contracting, and to take all sorts of shapes and tints, as is ever the case when one looks over-long at a bright thing. The mountain towered aloft, black and filled with strange shapes within, but white with the moonlight falling on its

snows without. The heavens were thick-sown with stars, a northern light at the far-off boundary just glimmering into view. A few paces from the window, by the water's edge, stood the trees, their shadows melting into one another; but the great ash stood alone and apart, drawing figures on the snow.

All was still, save that every now and then came the sound of a strident, wailing noise. "What is that?" asked Arne.

"The weathercock," answered Eli, adding, in a lower tone, as if to herself, "it must have broken loose."

Till then, Arne had been as one who would have talked, but could not. Now he spoke.

"Do you remember the tale of the thrushes and their singing?"

"Yes."

"Of course; why, it was you who told it us. It was a beautiful story."

"I often think," she said, in so soft a voice as he had never yet heard, he thought—"I often think there is something singing when one is quite still."

"That is the good in one's heart," said he.

She looked at him as if there was too much in that answer, and both were silent for awhile.

When next she spoke she was drawing on the pane with her finger. She asked him:

"Have you been making any new songs lately?"

He coloured up, but she could not see that, so she went on questioning.

"How do you set about making a song?"

"Do you really care to know?"

"Yes—yes."

"I keep hold and take care of thoughts that other people are glad to let go," he answered evasively, and she was silent again for awhile; for she was trying with one and

another of his songs, if she, too, had had the thoughts, but let them go.

"It is very wonderful," she said, as if to herself, and began to draw on the window-pane anew.

"I made a song the first time I saw you," said Arne.

"Where was that?"

"Down by the parsonage over there, that night you left them. I saw you in the water."

She laughed, stopped, and said:

"Let me hear the song."

Arne had never before done such a thing, yet now he trusted himself to sing the song to her.

"Fair Venevil hastened, with light-tripping feet,
Her lover to greet," etc.

Eli listened with great attention, and stood still for some minutes after the song was ended. Then at last she cried:

"Oh, how I pity poor Venevil!"

"It always seems to me as if I hadn't written it myself," said Arne. He was feeling ashamed now of having sung his own verses to her; he could not make out how it was he had come to do it, but he stood there now, thinking of the words. Then said Eli:

"But is that what's to happen to me, then?"

"No, no, no; I was thinking of myself when I made it."

"Is it to happen to you, then?"

"I don't know; but I felt so at that time. I feel so no longer; I used to be so melancholy at that time."

"That is strange," said she; and her fingers were busy on the window again.

Next morning, when Arne came in to dinner, he went straight to the window. Out of doors, the world was grey and heavy; within, warmth and comfort. On the window was written by a finger "Arne," "Arne," "Arne"—always

"Arne." It was the window by which Eli had been standing the night before.

But next day Eli did not come downstairs; she was poorly. Indeed, she had been by no means well of late; she said so herself, and besides, it was plain to see.

## CHAPTER XI.

### BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

NEXT day Arne came in and told them he had heard on the farm that Mathilde, the pastor's daughter, was just setting out on a visit to town; for some days, she herself thought, but, in reality, for a year or two. Eli, who had heard nothing of it till that moment, fainted away.

Arne had never seen such a thing before, and was very frightened. He ran for the servants, and they for her parents, who came breathless to the room. There was a confusion of noises all over the farm, the watch-dog by the barn door coming in with his deep bark. When Arne came in again somewhat later, he found the mother was on her knees by the bed, and the father was supporting his sick daughter's head. The maids were scurrying to and fro: one was running for water, another for the cordial drops that were in one of the cupboards, and a third was loosening the girl's bodice round her neck.

"Ah! God save and help us!" said the mother; "it was too idiotic of us to have told her nothing about it. It was all your doing, Baard. God save and help you!"

Baard made no reply.

"I told you so before," she went on; "but nothing's

ever done as I want it here. Ah! God help you! you're always so hard about her, Baard. You don't understand her at all. You don't know what it means to love anyone, you don't."

Still Baard was silent.

"She's not like others, that can bear sorrow, isn't Eli; it knocks her over completely, poor weak little thing! especially now, too, when she's so out of sorts. Wake up again, my dear little one, and we'll always be kind to you! Wake up again, my own Eli, and don't grieve us so!"

Then said Baard:

"You either keep silence too much, or else you talk too much;" and he looked at Arne, as if he wished him not to listen, but to go about his work. But as the maids just then came back, Arne thought he too might stay, so he only walked across to the window. The sick girl now so far recovered as to be able to open her eyes and see those about her; but at the same instant recollection returned, and with a cry of "Mathilde! Mathilde!" she fell into a fit of weeping, and sobbed so that it was pain for one to be in the room. Her mother sought to comfort her, while her father stood just so as to be seen by her; but the poor girl pushed them both away.

"Go, go!" she cried. "Go! I don't love you, either of you!"

"Christ Jesus!" said the mother, "don't you love your own parents?"

"No! you're cruel to me; and you take from me the only joy I have!"

"Eli, Eli! don't say such awful things," said her mother, sternly.

"Yes, mother, yes!" screamed the girl, hysterically; "now I must speak. Yes, mother! you want to marry me to that horrid man; and I won't have him. You shut me up here, where I'm never happy unless I can get out.

And you've taken Mathilde from me—the only person I love and care for in the world. Oh, God! what will become of me when Mathilde's no longer here! and now, now too, when there's so much I can't bear any longer, if I don't have some one to talk with!"

"But you haven't been there often with her lately, you know," said Baard.

"What did that matter, when I had her across there in the window?" answered the poor girl, sobbing like a little child, so that to Arne it seemed as if he never had heard the sound of weeping before.

"But you couldn't see her," said Baard.

"I could see the house," she retorted. And her mother interrupted vehemently, looking at him, "You can't understand anything of that, you!" So Baard said no more.

"Now I can never go to the window!" said Eli. "I used to go to it every morning when I got up; in the evening I sat there in the moonlight; and I went there always when I hadn't got to go anywhere else. Oh Mathilde! Mathilde!"

She writhed on the bed, and began to sob convulsively again. Baard sat down on a stool and gazed steadfastly at her.

Eli was not herself again so soon as they had perhaps expected. Towards evening they began to suspect that some illness was upon her that had probably been coming on for some time past; and Arne was called in to help to take her up to her own room. She was quite unconscious, pallid, and motionless. Her mother sat down beside her; her father stood by the bed, looking at her; presently he rose and went down to his work. Arne did the same; but that evening he prayed for her—prayed that one so young and pretty as she might live happy in this world, with no one to take her happiness from her.

Next day, when Arne came in, the father and mother

were sitting together, talking: the mother had plainly been weeping. Arne asked how Eli was going on; each expected the other to speak, so that it was a moment or two before he was answered. "Very sadly indeed," said the father, at last; and later on Arne heard that Eli had been wandering in her mind all night, or, as the father put it, "saying all sorts of queer things." Now she lay in a torpid state, recognising no one, and refusing to touch food. They had just been debating whether to call a doctor or not. When they rose to go to the patient's room, and Arne was left sitting by himself, it seemed to him as if life and death were struggling in the room above; but he must sit alone, apart from them.

In a few days, however, she was better. Once, as the father sat by her, a fancy took her to have Narrifas—the bird Mathilde had given her—by the bed. Then Baard told her what was too true—that, in all the confusion and worry of her illness, the bird had been forgotten, and was dead. The mother happened to come in just as he was speaking.

"Oh, God help me, Baard!" she cried. "You cruel creature, to tell your sick girl such a thing as that. Look, she's fainting away again! Look! God forgive you your heartlessness!"

Each time Eli came to at all she cried for her bird; declared passionately she could never be happy with Mathilde again, now that Narrifas was dead; begged to be allowed to go to her, and fell into a swoon again. Baard stood by looking at her till it was too hard to bear; then he tried to help soothe her, but Birgit pushed him aside, telling him to let the poor child alone. So Baard stood and looked at both for a long while, then he straightened his hat on his head with both hands, turned, and left the room.

The pastor and his wife came over later on, for her

illness gained fresh hold upon her now, and they knew not whether the end of it would be life or death.

Both the pastor and his wife gave Baard a bit of their minds, telling him he was too hard in his treatment of his child. They got to hear about the bird, and the pastor told him plainly that his conduct had been horribly unfeeling. He would like, he said, to take the girl back to their house as soon as she was better and able to be moved. The pastor's wife, indeed, refused to see him any longer; but she wept, and sat by Eli's bedside, fetched the doctor, received his directions, and came over to Böen several times a day to see that they were carried out. Baard wandered about the farm from one place to another, nearly always quite alone; often standing still for a long while, and then, straightening his hat on his head with both hands, falling to some work or other. The mother no longer spoke with him: they merely looked at one another. He went up to the sick girl several times a day, taking off his shoes at the foot of the stairs and laying down his hat outside the door before warily opening it. As soon as he came in, Birgit turned as if she had not seen him, then leant her head on her hand again, and looked straight before her at the patient, who lay there motionless, unaware of anything that was going on around her. Baard generally stood for a moment or two at the foot of the bed, looked at both of them, and saying nothing. Whenever Eli moved, as if about to awake, he glided away on the spot as silently as he had entered.

Often Arne thought that now had been said certain things between man and wife, as also between parents and child, which long had been stored up in secret among them, and would not now be soon put out of mind again. He longed to be gone, though he was all eagerness to know first how it was to turn out with Eli. But that he could always keep himself informed of, after all, thought he; so

he went to Baard and said that it was time for him to go home again: the work he had come for was done. Baard was sitting on the timber-chopping block in the yard when Arne came to him and told him; he was bending forward, digging in the snow with a wooden peg. Arne recognised the peg: it was the same that had held tight the weather-cock. Baard did not look up as he answered, "It's not pleasant, I know, to be here now; but still, I shouldn't like you to go." And he said no more, and neither did Arne. He waited a moment, then went and got something to do, as if it was settled that he was to remain.

Later in the day, when Arne was called in to dinner, he found Baard still sitting on the wood-block. Then Arne went up to him, and asked how Eli was that day.

"Bad, bad, I'm sure, to-day," answered Baard. "I see her mother's been weeping."

It seemed to Arne as if someone had invited him to sit down, so he placed himself on a bit of a felled tree, exactly opposite Baard.

"I've been thinking a good deal about your father the last few days," said Baard, so unexpectedly that Arne could make no reply.

"You know, of course," he went on, "what there was between us?"

"I know."

"Ah, but you only know one side of the matter, of course, and so you lay all the blame on me."

"You have surely," said Arne, after a moment's hesitation, "to answer for it to your God, as my father has already done."

"Ah, well! that must be as it may," answered Baard. "When I found this peg, though, it seemed so strange that you, of all men, should have come here and loosed the weathercock. But it's just as well, first as last, thought I." He had taken off his hat, and now he sat there looking at it.

Arne did not yet perceive that Baard was now wanting to talk to him of his father; nay, he did not even realize it when he began on the subject, for it seemed so unlike Baard. But now he gradually remarked, during the progress of Baard's talk, what had been going on in his heart; and if he had felt any respect before for this ponderous but thoroughly worthy man, be sure it was none the less after that.

"I was about fourteen," said Baard; and he paused here, as he did every now and then throughout his whole narrative. Then he said a few more words and paused again, so that every word of his story gave one the impression of being well weighed: "I was about fourteen when I first got to know your father, who was about the same age. . . . He was very spirited, and would own no one over im, and that was why he never could forget that I was number one at confirmation, and he was number two. . . . . He often challenged me to settle which was best man, but somehow it never came to anything; most likely because neither of us was quite confident of winning. . . . . But it's a funny thing, that he had quarrels and fights every day, and nothing came of it, while the one time I was drawn in it turned out as badly as it could; but, it's true, I had waited a long time. . . . . Nils ran after all the girls, and they after him. There was only one I cared about, but her he took from me at every dance, every wedding, every party: it was she to whom now I am married. . . . . Often, as I sat by, I longed to try my strength with him, just for that; but I was afraid that I might lose, and I knew that then I should lose her too. When all the people had gone away, I used to lift the weights he had lifted, and take the leaps he had leapt; but all the same, next time he danced off with the girl before my eyes. I could not bring myself to set everything on a throw with him, though once, as he stood fooling with her before my face, I took a full-

grown man and laid him across the beam above, as if just for fun. That made Nils turn a bit pale. . . . .

"But if he had only behaved well to her! but he was deceiving her, and that night after night. I really believe she liked him the better for it each time. . . . . So it came about that the end drew near. I would not have him going on like that any longer, and it was thus that he fell a bit heavier than I meant him to. . . . . I never saw him again."

They sat a long while silent. At length Baard went on:

"I began to court her again. She gave me neither yea nor nay, but I thought we should get on better together by-and-bye. We got married; our wedding took place down in the valley there, at her aunt's, who made her her heiress. We began with much, and that's since grown to more. Our farms had lain side by side, and now they were thrown into one—a thing I had longed to have done ever since my boyhood. . . . . But many other things were not as I had longed to have them." He broke off, and sat silent awhile. Arne thought he was weeping, but that was not so; yet his voice was gentler than usual when he went on: "At first she was very quiet and melancholy. I had nothing to say to console her, so I was silent too. A bit later on she began gradually to take up with those bustling, domineering ways you've no doubt noticed. At any rate, that's some alteration, thought I; so I said nothing now either. . . . . But one day of real happiness I've not had since I was married, and that I've been twenty years now." . . . .

At this, he broke the wooden peg in two, and sat looking at the pieces awhile.

"When Eli began to grow up, I thought it would be happier for her to be with strangers than with us. It's not often I've wanted my way in anything, but when I have it's mostly turned out all wrong—as it did in this instance. The mother sat longing for her child, though there was

only that bit of water between them; and at last, too, I began to suspect that it wasn't the best place in the world for her to be, for the parsonage people are a set of most kind-hearted noodles; but I was too late with my wisdom. She cares now for neither father nor mother."

He had taken off his hat again, and his long hair was hanging down over his eyes. He pushed it aside, and set on his hat with both hands, as if to go; but turning towards the house to rise, he paused again, and added, looking up at the attic window:

"I thought it would be better for Mathilde and her not to say farewell to one another; but that was foolish too. I told her the poor little bird was dead, because that was my fault, so it seemed to me I ought to tell her; but I was wrong there too. All I have done was always meant for the best, but it's always turned out for the worst, and now it's come so far that they're both speaking ill of me—wife and daughter; and here I am, wandering about alone."

A maid called to them that the meat was getting cold. Baard got up. "I hear the horses whinnying," said he; "they have been forgotten, I expect;" and he went off to the stables to give them some hay.

## CHAPTER XII.

### ARNE'S SONG.

ELI was very weak after her relapse. Her mother sat over her day and night, and was never to be seen downstairs; her father went up to pay his accustomed visits in his stocking-feet, always leaving his hat outside the door. Arne was still at the farm; he and Baard sat together in the evenings, and he had grown very fond of him. Baard was a well-informed and very thoughtful man, but inclined to be somewhat afraid of what he knew; but now, when Arne lent his aid, and told him of things that he did not know before, Baard was very grateful.

Eli was soon able to sit up at times; and after each attempt, as she got on better, she grew more and more full of whims. Thus it happened that one evening, as Arne sat in the room below hers, singing aloud, the mother came down and asked him, in Eli's name, to go up to her and sing, so that she could hear the words. Arne must surely have been sitting there singing for Eli as it was, for when Birgit spoke he turned red, and got up as if to deny that he had done so, though no one had said he had. However, he pulled himself up and said—trying to refuse—that he was scarcely able to sing at all. But he was answered by

the mother that that did not seem to be so when he sat alone.

Arne gave in and went. He had not seen Eli since the day he helped to carry her up: he felt that she must now be much changed, and that gave him a feeling of dread. But when he softly opened the door, and entered, there was such deep darkness that he saw no one. He paused by the door.

"Who is that?" asked Eli, in a clear, low tone.

"Arne Kampen," answered he, gently, trying to keep his voice from jarring on her nerves.

"It was good of you to come."

"How are you now, Eli?"

"Thanks; now I am getting better."

"You must sit down, Arne," she said, after a pause; and Arne felt his way to a chair that stood by the foot of the bed. "It was so nice to hear you singing, that you must sing a little to me up here."

"If I only knew what to sing!"

There was silence for a moment, and then, "Sing a hymn," said the girl. And he did so, singing a bit of a Confirmation hymn. As he finished, he heard her weeping, and did not dare to sing any more; but presently she said, "Sing another," and he sang one that is often heard in church.

"How many things I have thought of while I've been lying here!" said Eli, when he had finished.

He knew not what to answer, and he heard her weeping again to herself in the darkness. A clock, which was ticking away on the wall, gathered itself up for a blow, and struck out the hour.

Eli slowly drew breath once or twice, as if trying to lighten a load on her breast, and said:

"One knows so little; one can't even get to know one's own father or mother. I have not been good to them,

and that's why it makes me feel so strange now to hear the Confirmation hymn."

When people talk in the dark, they are likely to be more truthful than when they see one another's faces, and to speak more freely too.

"It makes me happy to hear you say that," answered Arne. He was thinking of what she had said when she fell ill.

She understood what was in his heart, and added:

"Had not that happened to me, God knows how long I might have been without having found mother."

"Has she spoken freely with you, then?"

"Every day: she has done nothing else."

"Then you must have heard much from her?"

"You may well say so."

". . . She talked to you about my father, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Does she still think of him?"

"She still thinks of him."

"He did not treat her well."

"Poor mother!"

"He treated himself far worse, though."

But there was something in the heart of each, that neither would tell the other. It was Eli who first spoke again:

"You are said to be like your father."

"They say so," he answered, uneasily.

She did not notice his tone, so she returned to the subject again.

"Could he, too, make songs?"

"No."

"Sing me a song—one that you have made yourself."

But it was not Arne's habit to admit that any song he sang was his own.

"I have none," he said.

"But you will have one, and you'll sing it to me, too, won't you?"

And he did for her now what he never had done for anyone else. This was the song he sang:

"Green stood the Tree, with its leaves tender-bright.
'Shall I take them?' said Frost, as he breathed thro' the night.
'Oh! pray let them be,
Till my blossoms you see!'
Begged the Tree, as she shivered and shook in affright.

"Sweet sang the birds the fair blossoms among.
'Shall I take them?' said Wind, as he swayed them and swung.
'Oh! pray let them be,
Till my berries you see!'
Begged the Tree, as its branches all quivering hung.

"Bright grew the berries beneath the sun's heat.
'Shall I take them?' said Lassie, so young and so sweet.
'Ah! take them, I crave,
Take all that I have!'
Begged the Tree, as it bent its full boughs to her feet."

The song seemed well nigh to take her breath away. He, too, sat there when it was ended, as if he had said more in his song than he had wanted.

Darkness lies heavy upon those who sit together in it, but do not talk; they are never nearer together than then. He heard it if she but turned, or merely drew her hand across the coverlet; he heard her, if she so much as breathed a little deeper than usual.

"Arne, couldn't you teach me to make songs?"

"Have you never tried?"

"Yes, lately; but I can't get on."

"What have you tried to make your songs about?"

"About mother, and all her love for your father."

"That's a difficult subject."

"I've cried over it so, too."

"You must not seek for subjects: they come."

"How do they come?"

"Like other things one longs for—when one least expects them."

Both were silent awhile.

"I wonder, Arne," she said, at length, "that you, who have so much that is beautiful within yourself, should want to go away."

"How do you know I want to?"

She did not answer, but lay silent, as if in thought.

"Arne, you must not go away!" she said; and it set his blood aflame.

"There are times when I seem not to want to so much," he said.

"Your mother must be very fond of you. I must get to know your mother."

"Come over to Kampen, when you're well again," said he. And at the words he seemed to see her sitting in the bright room at Kampen, looking out at the mountains. His heart began to beat fast, and his blood to rush to his head. "It's very warm in here," said he; and he rose, as if to go.

She heard his movement.

"Are you going, Arne?" said she; and he sat down again. "You must come here oftener now. Mother's taken such a liking to you."

"I like to come, too . . . . but I must have something to come for."

Eli was silent for a while, as if she were reflecting.

"I think," she said, "mother has something she will ask you about."

He heard her raising herself up in the bed. No sound was there in the room, or below, save the clock ticking on the wall. Suddenly she broke out:

"Would to God summer were here!"

"Summer!" and at the word rose up before him fragrant leaves, and the tinkle of cattle-bells, merry sounds from the hills, and songs from the valleys, the black water glittering in the sun, and the homesteads reflected in its ripples. Eli came out, and was sitting down just as she had done that evening long ago.

"If summer were here," said she, "if I could sit on the hill, I certainly believe I should be able to sing a song of my own."

He laughed, and asked, "What would it be about?"

"About something that would be easy enough—about—about—I don't know!"

"Tell me, Eli!" and he rose joyously; but a thought struck him, and he sat down again.

"Not you, for all the world!" And she laughed.

"I sang to you when you asked me."

"That's true—but no, no, no!"

"Eli, do you think I'd make fun of the little verses you've made?"

"No, that I don't, Arne; but it's not anything I've made myself."

"Is it anybody else's, then?"

"Yes; it came of itself to me, so to speak."

"Well, then, surely you can tell it me."

"No, no; it's not anything of that sort either, Arne. Don't ask me any more."

She was certainly hiding her head in the bed, he knew, for the last words were scarcely audible.

"Well, Eli, you're not as kind to me as I've been to you!" and he rose.

"Arne, it's different—you don't understand me—but it was—I don't know—some other time—don't be cross with me, Arne! Don't go away!" And she began to cry.

"Eli, what is the matter with you?" and he listened. "Are you ill?" he asked, but he did not think she was.

She was still weeping, and he felt that now he must move—either forward or back.

"Eli!"

"Yes!"—both voices in a whisper.

"Give me your hand."

She made no answer. He listened, quickly, closely—stretched out his own hand, and grasped a warm little hand that lay bare.

There was a step on the stairs, and they let go of one another.

It was Birgit, coming in with a light. "You've been sitting too long in the dark," said she, and put the candle on the table. But neither Eli nor he could bear the light; she turned to the pillow, and he held his hand before his eyes. "Ah, yes; it's a bit dazzling at first," said the mother; "but the feeling soon passes away."

Arne groped about on the floor for his hat—which he had never brought in with him—and so left the room.

Next day, he heard that Eli was going to come down for awhile after dinner. He put his tools together, and bade farewell to the farm. When she came down he was gone.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MARGIT'S CONFESSION.

SPRING comes late among the mountains. The post that speeds along the highway three times a week comes only once a week in April, and the mountain-dwellers begin to feel that now the snow has begun to melt in the world without, the ice is breaking, the steamers are travelling to and fro again, and the harrow is breaking the soil once more. With them, the snow still lies three ells high, the cattle are still lowing from their stalls, and the birds that come back hide themselves shivering. The chance traveller tells them that he has left his carriole down in the valley below, and shows them flowers that he has plucked by the roadside. Then the mountaineers begin to be filled with longings as they go about talking to one another, looking at the sun, and discussing how much higher in the sky it gets daily. They strew ashes on the slippery snow, and their thoughts wander to those who now are plucking flowers.

At such a season was it that old Margit Kampen came up to the parsonage, and asked to be allowed to speak to the pastor. She was taken into his study, where the minister, a slimly-built, fair-haired, kind-looking man, with large eyes covered by spectacles, received her friendlily (for he knew her), and bade her sit down.

"Anything fresh about Arne?" he asked, as if they had often spoken together on that subject.

"Ah, God help me!" said Margit; "there's never anything but good that I have to say of him; and yet it's so hard." And she looked very sad as she spoke.

"Has his old longing come back again?" asked the pastor.

"Worse than ever," said the mother. "I don't believe that he'll stay with me now even till spring's here."

"But he promised never to leave you."

"That he did. But, good Lord! he must act for himself now. If his mind's set on it, he can't well help himself. But what's to become of me?"

"All the same, I don't really believe he'll ever forsake you," said the pastor.

"No; but suppose he's not happy at home? Dare I have it on my conscience that I'm in his way? There are times when I think I ought to beg him to go."

"How do you know that he wants to go now more than before?"

"Ah! by many things. Since the middle of winter he hasn't worked anywhere in the parish for a single day. On the other hand, he's made three trips to the town, and each time been a long while there. He scarcely ever speaks now at his work, though that's often been his habit. He sits for a long, long while by himself in the little garret window, looking out towards the mountains and the ravine. He sits there all Sunday afternoons; and often when there's moonlight he'll sit there till far past midnight."

"Does he never read aloud to you?"

"Every Sunday, as usual, of course, he reads and sings to me; but he seems to hurry over it, except now and again, when he makes almost too much of it."

"Does he ever talk to you?"

"Often not for so long at a time that I can't help crying to myself; then he notices that, and begins to talk; but only of little things, never of serious ones."

The pastor paced up and down, paused, and asked:

"Why don't *you* talk to *him* of them, then?"

It was long before she answered. She gave two or three sighs, she looked at the ground and aside, she folded her kerchief and unfolded it.

"I've come here to-day," she said, at last, "to talk with you, sir, about something that's heavy on my heart."

"Speak freely; it will lighten it."

"I trust it will; for I have now crept under the burden for many and many a year, and each year it grows heavier and heavier."

"What is it, then, my poor woman?"

There was a moment's hesitation before she spoke.

"I have committed a great sin against my son," and she began to weep.

The pastor went close to her. "Confess it to me, then, and let us pray God together to forgive it you."

Margit sobbed, and dried her tears, and began to weep again as soon as she tried to speak, and thus she went on for some time. The pastor endeavoured to comfort her. "It certainly couldn't be such a dreadful thing that she had done," he said; "she was too severe to herself," and so forth. But Margit went on weeping, and could not make a beginning of her story till the pastor sat down by her side and began to question her kindly. Then it came out, bit by bit. "He was unhappy," she said, "when he was a boy, and that made him long to travel. Well, he met Kristen—that Kristen who's now such a great man out there where they dig up gold; and Kristen gave Arne so many books that he was no longer the same as we peasant folks. The two sat together night after night, and when Kristen went off, Arne wanted to go too. But

at that time," she went on, "his father died so terribly, and my boy promised never to leave me. But I was like a hen that's had a duck's egg put under her. When the little one grew up a bit, he wanted to go out on the great water, and I went about everywhere crying. If he didn't actually go himself, his songs were always of travel, so that I expected every morning to find his bed empty.

"Then it was that there came for him a letter from a long, long way off; and this must be (I knew) from Kristen. God forgive me! I took and hid it. I thought that was the end of it; but presently came another, and, as I had hidden the first, I had to do the same with this one too. But it was as if they were burning a hole in the box where I put them, for I could think of nothing but that from the moment I opened my eyes to the time I went to bed. And, just imagine what was worst of all—there came a third letter! I stood with it in my hand for a quarter of an hour; I carried it about with me in my dress for three days, weighing with myself whether to give it to him or put it away with the other two; but, perhaps (thought I) it might have the power to entice away my boy from me, and so I could not help putting it with the rest. Now, I went in fear the whole day long; not only because of those in the box, but also of anything new coming. I was afraid of every person who came near the farm; and when we were both indoors and there came a rap, I trembled all over: it might be a letter, and then he would take it in himself. When he was away in the village, I kept pacing about the farm, thinking, 'Now perhaps he's been given a letter out there, and has found out from it about the others that have come!' When he came back, I looked at his face as he was still far off, and if he smiled—good God! how glad I was, for by that I knew he had heard nothing! He had grown so handsome now, too—just like his father, but fairer and gentler. And then he had

such a beautiful voice for singing! When he sat on the threshold in the evening, singing up at the mountains above, and listening for the echo, then I knew that I could never bear to lose him! If I only saw him, if I only knew that he was anywhere near, if he merely seemed happy, and gave me a nod now and again, then I felt there was nothing more I wanted here on earth, and I would not have had any one of my tears unwept.

"But just as it seemed he was getting happier, and to like being among people more than he used to, there came a message one day from the post office that now a fourth letter had come, and in it two hundred dollars! I thought I should have sunk to the ground as I stood there: what *was* I to do now? This letter, of course, I could put out of the way as before—but the money? I got no sleep for many a night for that money. I put it at one time in the garret, at one time in the cellar behind a cask, and once I was so desperate that I put it in the window, for him to find; but when I heard him coming, I took it away again. At last I hit on a plan: I gave him the money, and told him it was some that had been owing since my mother's death. He buried it in the ground—a thing I had myself thought of; so that (I thought) was over. But as luck would have it, that very autumn, as he sat there one evening, he kept saying he wondered that Kristen should have forgotten him so completely.

"That made my wound break out again. It was sin that I had done, and sin to no purpose!

"The mother who has sinned against her child is the unhappiest of all mothers; and yet I had only done it from love of him. So it is that I am surely to be punished by losing my dearest. Ever, since midwinter now, he's been singing the tune he always sings when the longing to go seizes upon him; 'tis the song he has sung from his boyhood, and I never hear it without turning pale. It's then

that I feel I could do anything. And here you shall see," she said, drawing forth a paper from her bodice, unfolding it, and giving it to the pastor. "Here is something he writes at, every now and then; they are certainly words to that tune. I brought it with me because I can't read such fine writing. Will you please see if there's anything in it about going away?"

There was only one complete verse on the paper. Here and there was a line, or half a line, of other stanzas, as if it were a song that he had forgotten, and was now trying to recollect line by line. And this was how the first verse ran:

"Fain would I know what the world may be
Over the mountains high.
Mine eyes can nought but the white snow see,
And up the steep sides the dark fir-tree,
That climbs as if yearning to know.
Say, tree, wilt thou venture to go?"

"Is it about travelling?" asked Margit, hungrily watching the pastor's face.

"Yes, it is about travelling," said he; and let the paper fall.

"I knew it! Oh God! I knew it all the time, well enough!"

She looked at the pastor with clasped hands, her face haggard, her eyes wild with excitement, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

But here the pastor could no more help her than she could herself. "The lad must be left alone," said he; "life can't be made different for his sake; but maybe he'll come to see something more in it of his own accord. Just now it looks as if he thought he might get that 'something more' by wandering in search of it."

"Why, that's just like the old woman!" said Margit.

"The old woman?"

"The old woman who wandered on and on to get sunlight, instead of making a window in the wall to let it come in!"

The pastor was struck by her acuteness; but, indeed, it was not the first time he had been astonished, when she got on the subject of Arne's longings: truth to tell, Margit had given her thoughts to nothing else these seven or eight years past.

"Do you think he'll go? what am I to do? and the money and the letters?" she cried, her thoughts all crowding in upon her.

"As to the letters, your conduct has been wrong. You'll find it difficult to answer for having kept from him what was his. Worse still, you have let a fellow creature—and one who by no means deserved it—appear in a contemptible light to your son, and, what makes it worst of all, one of whom he was so fond, and who in turn was so much attached to him. But we will pray to God to forgive you: we will both pray to Him."

Margit bowed her head; she had been sitting all along with her hands folded. "How gladly," she said, "would I pray for forgiveness, if only I knew he would stay!"

She was evidently mixing up God and Arne in her mind. The pastor made as if he did not hear her.

"Do you mean now," he asked, "to tell him the truth straightaway?"

She fixed her eyes on the ground, and said, in a low tone:

"If only I might wait a little, I would gladly do it."

The pastor smiled, without letting her see it.

"Don't you think," he said, "the longer you delay the greater is your sin?"

She was twisting her kerchief in both her hands; she folded it up into a little square, and was now trying, but vainly, to make it into a still smaller one.

"If I tell him about the letters," she murmured, "he'll go off, I'm afraid."

"You dare not trust to God, then?"

"Ah yes, of course!—but still," she added, "suppose he were to leave me now, all the same?"

"You are more afraid, then, of his going away than of your being left in sin?"

Margit had unrolled her kerchief again, and she raised it to her eyes now, for the tears were beginning to fall. The pastor sat looking at her for a moment, and then:

"Why have you been telling me all this," he went on, "if you didn't mean it to lead to something?" And he paused for a reply, but none came.

"Did you think, perhaps," he went on, "that your sin would be less when once you had confessed it to someone?"

"That is what I thought," she said, softly, her head bowed still more deeply on her breast. The pastor smiled, and rose.

"Yes, yes, my dear Margit," he said, "you must now so act that in your old age you may have happiness."

"If only I might keep what I have now!" said she. And it seemed to the pastor as if she dared not hope for any greater happiness than always to live in her present constant anxiety. He smiled, and filled his pipe.

"If only," he muttered, "there were some little lassie, now, who could get hold of him, he'd stay here fast enough then, you'd soon see!"

She looked up quickly, and followed the pastor's movements with her eyes, till he came and paused before her.

"Eli Böen—? What—? eh—?" he said.

She blushed fiery red, and looked down again, but made no answer. The pastor, still halting before her, awaiting her reply, said (as if to himself):

"If only we could manage so that they could oftener come together to the parsonage here!"

She peered up into his face to see if he were in serious earnest, but she scarcely dared really believe him.

He began to walk up and down again, but presently he paused:

"Look here, now, Margit—to come to the point: was that the real reason that brought you here to-day?"

She looked fixedly at the floor, put a couple of fingers in her twisted kerchief, and pulled them out of the tip of it:

"Ah, yes," she said, "God help me! that was really just it."

The pastor burst out laughing, and rubbed his hands.

"Was it that, perhaps, you wanted last time you were here, then?"

She drew out the end of the kerchief still further, pulling and pulling at it, till she at last got out:

"As you say so yourself, it must have been, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! Oh Margit, Margit! Well, well, we'll see what we can do; for, truth to tell, my wife and daughter have long been of the same mind."

"Is that possible?" cried Margit. And she looked up with so happy, and yet so shame-faced an expression, that it quite rejoiced the pastor to see her open, handsome face, where it was plain to read the child's heart, in spite of all sorrow or fear.

"Yes, Margit," said he. "You who have so much love in you will surely, for Love's own sake, get forgiveness, both of your God and your son, for your transgressions. You have indeed had your punishment already in the constant and great anxiety you have lived in. We shall see now whether God will make speedy ending to it all; for if He wills it so, He will lend us His aid in this."

She sighed deeply again and again; then she rose up, thanked him, curtsied, walked across the room, and curtsied farewell again on the threshold. The moment she was out of the room, she felt as if transformed. She looked up to the heavens with a quick glance, full of shining thankfulness, and hastened down the steps, and the farther she got the quicker she went, walking back to Kampen that day with a lighter heart than she had had for many and many a year. When she got so far as to be able to see the smoke curling thick and merrily from the chimney, she blessed the house, the farmyard, the whole homestead, and the pastor too, and Arne, and remembered that they were to have smoked meat for dinner, which was her favourite dish.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### BY THE BLACK WATER.

KAMPEN was a fine farm. It lay in the midst of the level ground that had the rocky ravine for boundary on the lower side, and the high road on the other. On the upper side of the road stood a thick, close wood, just behind it began the mountain slope, and in the distance towered up the blue, snow-capped peaks. In a like way, on the other side of the ravine rose another broad range of mountains, that curved away by the Black Water, just at the spot where Böen lay, and then went higher and higher up towards Kampen, but turned aside on its way towards the broad valley known as the "Lower Parish," that began at this spot; for Kampen was the last farm in the "Upper Parish."

The front door of the dwelling-house at Kampen opened towards the road: from the one to the other, a distance of several hundred yards, led a path with leafy birch-trees on both sides of it. On both sides, too, of the cultivated lands lay woods: the farm-lands and meadows could thus be easily increased as much as one pleased; indeed, it was in most respects a splendid spot for farming.

In front of the house lay a garden; Arne laid it out and looked after it, as he had learnt to from his books. To the

left were the cattle-sheds and the other outhouses; they were for the most part newly-built, and formed a square with the dwelling-house. This latter was painted red, with window-frames and doors of white; it had two storeys, and was thatched with turf, so that little bits of green were growing on the roof. On the ridge of this latter was a staff, on which stood a weathercock that turned with a shrill scream.

Spring had come to the mountains. One Sunday morning the air was somewhat heavy, but calm and not cold: a sort of mist seemed to lie over the forest; but it would lift as the day went on, thought Margit. Arne had read the sermon to his mother, and sung hymns, and it had made him feel happy. Now he was standing in full trim to go up to the parsonage. He opened the door: the fragrance of fresh foliage struck upon his senses from the garden, standing deep-clothed in morning mist; from the ravine came the mighty thunderous sound that made the ears tremble of him that heard it.

Arne began his up-hill walk. As he got further from the water-fall, the sound of the rush of the water was less and less awe-inspiring; but it seemed now to spread out over the whole landscape, like the full, deep tone of an organ.

"God be with him on the way he's going now!" said the mother, opening the window, and following him with her eyes till the bushes hid him. The mist lifted bit by bit, the sun's rays pierced it through, and life sprang up again in meadow and garden: all Arne's work was growing there (thought Margit) with fresh strength, bringing forth fragrance and joy for his mother. Spring is beautiful, indeed, for one who has long borne winter.

Arne had no definite object at the parsonage, but he wanted to hear about the newspapers that he took in with the pastor. Lately he had seen the names of several

Norwegians who had done well for themselves at gold-mining in America, and among them was Kristen. Now, Arne had heard a vague rumour that Kristen was expected home. Of this he thought he could get certain information at the parsonage; and if it should be really true that Kristen had already come back to the town, Arne thought he would go and see him in the interval between the end of spring and the hay-cutting.

Deep in these thoughts, he strode along till he got to where he could see the Black Water, and, on the other side of it, Böen. The mist was lifting there, too, by this time, and the sun's rays were sporting over the green sward; the mountain stood with its head all golden, but its breast deep-wrapped in haze; the forest threw its dense shadow over the water on the right, but just in front of the house the waves had receded somewhat, and the white sand lay glistening in the sun. At a bound, his thoughts were within the red-painted building with the white doors and window-frames, which he had painted his own to be like. He remembered not the first heavy days he had spent there; he only remembered the summer they both saw—he and Eli—up there in the sick-room. Since then, he had never been there; after that, he never would—not for all the world. If his thoughts but turned that way, it made him hot and red, and filled him with shame—though, indeed, he thought of it every single day, and many times a day, too; but if there was one thing which could drive him away from the place, it was (he felt) just that!

On he strode, as if he would take himself far from it all; but the more he walked, the nearer he came to being right opposite Böen, and, consequently, the more he looked at it. The mist was all gone now; the heavens were shining clear from one end to the other, the birds swimming in the sun-bright air and crying joyously to one another, the fields answering in myriads of bright blossoms. There was no

thunderous waterfall there, to sober radiant joy into awe and reverence; but freely, boundlessly, full of life, it burst forth—singing, shining, rejoicing, on its upward way.

Arne had walked himself burning hot. He threw himself down on the grass at the foot of a knoll, glanced over at Böen, and turned away, so that his eyes might no longer look that way. Then he heard singing above him, clear-sounding as none he had ever heard before. It darted up from the meadow, among the songs of the birds, and almost before he could make sure of the tune, he recognised the words; for the tune was the one he loved best of all, and the words were those he had had in his heart from his childhood—and lost, the very day he had brought them forth! He sprang up, as if to catch them now; but, instead, paused and listened. There came rippling down to him the first verse, then the next, then the third, the fourth—all the verses of his own lost song.

"Fain would I know what the world may be
Over the mountains high.
Mine eyes can nought but the white snow see,
And up the steep sides the dark fir-tree,
That climbs as if yearning to know.
Say, tree, dost thou venture to go?

"The eagle flies in his fearless way
Over the mountains high;
In triumph he swims through the young, fresh day,
Spends his wild heart in the hunt for his prey,
And drops where he chooses to rest,
Obedient to no man's behest.

"Thou yearn'st not to journey, O apple-tree green,
Over the mountains high;
For in winter thou waitest till summer-time sheen
Shall clothe thee with blossoms so fair to be seen.
What the birds sing, as flying they go,
Thou know'st not—nor carest to know.

"He who has longed twenty years in his soul
To be over the mountains high,
Yet who knows that he never will reach that goal,
And feels weaker and feebler as swift the years roll,—
Let him learn from the birds on the wing
The tidings of comfort they bring.

"Carolling birds, say, why left you there,
Over the mountains high,
Your warm little nests, and a land so fair,
With its leafier trees and its mild, sweet air?
Say, was it only to bring
Longing, longing—but never a wing?

"Say, am I never, never to go
Over the mountains high?
Ye ice-bound rocks, will ye weigh on me so,
That ye smother my heart 'neath the depths of your snow,
Penned 'mid your darksome gloom,
Till ye yield me up to the tomb?

"Up, heart, up! and away, away!
Over the mountains high.
For my courage is young, and my soul will be gay,
If no longer bound straitly and fettered I stay,
But seeking yon summit to gain,
No more beat my wings here in vain.

"One day, I know, shall my journey be
Over the mountains high.
Lord God! fair is the dwelling of Thee.
Say, is the portal unbarred for me?
Not yet let its hinges turn;
Grant me to live—and to yearn."

Arne stood listening till the last verse, the last word, died away. Once more he heard the birds singing merrily and flitting about, but he scarce knew whether he himself dared move. But see who it was he must, at any rate. He moved towards the place, planting his steps so warily that not even the rustle of the grass could be heard. A little butterfly settled upon a flower just in front of his foot,

fluttered up, flew on a little, and settled down again; up again and on, and on, and on in front of him all the way, as he crept to the top of the hill. There, in front of him, stood a thick clump of bushes; he need go no further, for now he could see. A bird flew up from amidst the undergrowth with a twitter of affright, and sped away over the hill. She looked up—she who was sitting there. He ducked low down, holding his breath, with his heart beating so that he could hear every pulsation, and listening with every fibre; he dared not let a leaf rustle—for it was she—it was Eli!

Long, long after, he looked up a little, and would have liked to draw himself a step nearer; but the bird had its nest, perhaps, among the undergrowth (thought he), and he would not run the risk of trampling it down, so he peered through the foliage as the boughs swung apart or drew together. The sunlight was falling straight on her, as she sat there in her black, sleeveless bodice, with her boy's straw hat, placed loosely and sideways on her head. In her lap lay a book, but on it a profusion of wild flowers; her right hand was playing among them, as if she were lost in thought; her left arm was resting on her knee and supporting her head. Her eyes were following the bird's flight, and it looked as if she might have been weeping.

A thing more beautiful had Arne never seen or dreamt of all his lifetime. The sun was scattering all his gold on her and about her; and it seemed to him that the song, though she had long ceased singing, was floating about him, till he felt as if his heart and his breath were beating time to it.

She took the book and opened it, shut it again quickly, and, sitting as before, began to hum. It was his song:

"Green stood the tree, with its leaves tender bright," etc.

He could hear that, though she did not remember either the words or the tune properly, and often went wrong in them. The last verse was the one she knew best, so she ran over it again and again; but this was how she sang it:

"Bright grew the berries, so red, ripe and rare.
'May I take you?' said Lassie, so young, and so fair.
'Yes, take them, I pray,
This sunshiny day,'
Said the tree—tralala, tralalalala—fair!"

And then up she sprang quickly, shook off all her flowers around her, and carolled out so loudly that her voice seemed to thrill through the air, and well nigh to reach Böen. And away she darted!—Should he call to her? No!

Down the hills she sped, singing, trilling; off fell her hat in her speed, and she stood still among the tall grass to pick it up. "Shall I call?" he thought, "she's looking round!"—and down he ducked again. It was long before he dared peer forth; at first he dared not raise more than his head—he could not see her; then he knelt, but still he could not see her; then he rose to his feet—she was gone! . . .

He no longer wanted to go to the parsonage. He no longer wanted anything! He went and sat where she had been sitting, and he was sitting there still when the sun above him marked mid-day. On the lake was not a single ripple; from the homesteads, smoke was beginning to curl up; the water-fowl ceased calling one after another; the smaller birds were at play, but they were moving towards the shade of the woods; all the dew was gone, and the grass looked soberly demure; there was not a breath of wind to stir the leaves; the sun was now at its mid-day height. He knew not how it was, he found himself, as he sat there, making a little song. A soft tune came into his

heart, offering itself to him, and, with his breast strangely filled with all gentle feelings, the tune hovered about him, till they melted together into one harmonious whole.

He sang it, softly and peacefully as he had composed it:

"In the woods the lad wandered the whole day long,
The whole day long;
For there he had heard such a wonderful song,
Such a wonderful song.

"He made him a flute from a willow-tree,
From a willow-tree;
And sought if therein lay the melody,
The melody.

"It came, and it whispered its name to him,
Its name to him;
But, whispering, died in the forest dim,
In the forest dim.

"And as he lay sleeping, it stole to him oft,
Stole to him oft.
In dreams it would lovingly hover aloft,
Hover aloft.

"But when, joyously listening, he woke from his dream,
Woke from his dream,
Far off hung the song in the wan moon-beam,
The wan moon-beam.

"'Oh, Father in Heaven! now take me from hence,
Take me from hence!
The song it has stolen my heart and sense,
My heart and sense.'

"But our Father answered: 'It loves thee well,
It loves thee well,
Tho' it never thine own for an hour may dwell,
For an hour may dwell.

"'For no other song shalt thou long and pine,
Long and pine;
But for this one alone, which can never be thine,
Never be thine.'"

## CHAPTER XV.

### ARNE'S TREASURE.

IT was a Sunday evening in summer-time; the pastor had come back from church, and Margit had been with him at his house till nearly seven o'clock. Then she bade him farewell, and hastened down the steps, and out into the farm-yard, for there she had just caught sight of Eli Böen, who had for some time past been playing with the little boy and her own brother.

"Good evening," said Margit, coming to a standstill, "God bless you all!"

"Good evening," said Eli, blushing red, and trying to leave off her game with the children, who kept pressing her to go on; but she begged them to let her go, and got their gracious permission for that one evening.

"It really seems to me," said Margit, "that I must know you."

"That may well be," replied the other.

"Surely you must be Eli Böen?"

Eli acquiesced.

"Ah! so then you really *are* Eli Böen! Yes, I see now you're very like your mother."

Eli's auburn hair had come down, and was hanging long and loose about her; her face was hot, and brown as a

berry; she could not get breath to speak, and she laughed at herself for being in such a state.

"Well, well," said Margit, looking at her with pleasure, "it's natural for young folks to be merry. You don't know me, I suppose?"

Eli had been wanting to ask her name, but could not pluck up courage to do it, because the other was so much her elder; now she said in answer, that she did not remember having seen her before.

"Ah no," Margit said, "that was scarcely to be expected, of course: we old people seldom get about much. Perhaps though, you know my son a bit—Arne Kampen? I'm his mother." And she shot a glance at Eli, upon whose face had come a quick and new expression. "I think," she went on "he did some work once over there at Böen?"

Yes, that was so, Eli said.

"What beautiful weather it is this evening! We heaped up the hay to-day, and took it all in before I came out," continued Margit. "This is really God's own weather."

"It must indeed be a glorious year for hay," said Eli.

"You may well say so, indeed. Is there a good crop at Böen?"

"They've taken it all in by now."

"Yes, I suppose so; sturdy folks, quick work. Are you going back to-night?"

No, she was not.

They talked together about one thing and another, and by degrees got intimate enough for Margit to venture to ask if Eli would walk with her part of the way.

"Can't you give me your company just for a few steps?" she said; "it's so seldom I meet anyone to talk to, and I dare say it's much the same with you."

Eli had no jacket with her; she could not come, she said.

"Ah, it's too bad of me, I know," said Margit, "to ask such a thing, the first time I've ever seen you; but one must put up with something from old folks."

Eli said she would be very glad to go with her; she would just run in and get her jacket.

It was a tight-fitting jacket; when it was fastened about her, it looked as if she had merely a bodice on; but now she fastened only the two lowest hooks, she was so warm. Her pretty linen vest had a little collar, that turned down and spread out round her neck, and was fastened by a silver clasp in the shape of a bird, with outstretched wings. Just such a one had Nils Skrædder worn, the first time Margit Kampen danced with him.

"A pretty clasp," said she, looking at it.

"I had it from mother," said Eli.

"So I expected," said Margit, helping her to fix it properly. They walked along side by side. The hay was heaped up, and lay in little stacks; Margit pulled bits out of them, smelt it, and found it good. She asked about the cattle on the parsonage farm, questioned Eli about those at Böen, and told her how big those were that they had at Kampen.

"The place has been getting on mightily these last few years," she said, "and there's room for it to grow as much as one pleases. It supports twelve milch-cows now, and it might have more, but my son's got so many books that he reads and goes by, and so he will have them all so well fed."

Eli had nothing to say to all this, as was to be expected. Then Margit asked her how old she was.

She was nineteen.

"Have you taken any part in the house-work? you look so delicate that you can scarcely have done much," said Margit.

Oh yes, Eli had borne her share in lots of ways—especially of late.

"Ah, it's good to be used to doing a little of all that sort of thing; when one has a large house oneself, there's so much wants doing and looking after; of course, though, when one finds good help at hand in the house, there's not so much need."

Eli thought she must be going back now, for they had got long past the parsonage lands.

"Oh, it'll be a long time yet," urged Margit, "before the sun goes down It would be so nice of you if you came a little further, and talked to me." And Eli went with her.

Then Margit began to talk of Arne.

"I don't know if you know him much. He can teach you something about everything. God bless me! what a lot he has read!"

Eli admitted that she knew he had read a great deal.

"Ah! yes; and that's the least to be said for him. Far more than that is how he's behaved to his mother all his life-long—far more, I can tell you! If the old saying's true, that he who's good to his mother 'll be good to his wife, then she he chooses won't need much pity. What is it you're looking for my child?"

"Oh, I dropped a little twig I was carrying."

Both were silent for a while, and went on without looking at one another.

"It's so curious in him," the mother began again; "he was always so kept down and shy as a child, and so he got into the habit of thinking over everything to himself, and people of that sort don't easily pluck up heart."

Eli felt sure she ought to be going back now; but Margit said it was such a little way up to Kampen that she really must come and see it now, since she had got so far.

Eli declared it was too late for doing so that day.

"Oh, we have always someone or other there who'll see you safely home," said Margit.

"No, no!" cried Eli quickly, making as if to go.

"What a pity," said Margit, "Arne's not at home, so that he can't see you back; but still, there are others there."

And now Eli made less objection. She would very much like to see Kampen, of course (she said), if only it didn't get too late.

"Well, if we stand talking here long it certainly will be," said Margit. And on they went again.

"I suppose you've read lots of books," said the mother, "as you've been brought up at the parsonage."

Yes, she had read a good many.

"That will be useful," said Margit, "if you have a husband who's read less."

Eli had no intention of having such a one, she said.

"Well, well, it's best not to, of course; but here in these parts folks don't get much book-learning."

Eli asked what the smoke came from, away there in the wood.

"That's the new crofter's clearing; it belongs to Kampen. A man called Upland Knut lives there. He was all alone in the world, so Arne gave him the place to clear and live in. Poor Arne, he knows what it is to be alone!"

Presently they were high enough up to see Kampen. The sun was straight in their faces; they put up their hands to shield them, and looked down. On the middle of the plain lay the farm-house, its wall painted red, its window-frames white; round about it the meadows were mown, and the hay was piled up in stacks, the heavy-laden, rich-looking fields of grain contrasting with the pale, shorn hay-fields. Away by the cattle-sheds all was busy life, for cows, sheep, and goats were just come home, amid the tinkling of bells, the baying of dogs, the cry of the milking maids; and above and through all these sounds rose up from the ravine the thunderous voice of the waterfall. The longer Eli looked, the more this last alone took possession

of her, filling her with such awe that at length it made her heart beat fast, and roared and thundered through and through her head till she grew quite dazed, and at the same time so timid and nervous that she began unconsciously to take such careful little steps that Margit had to ask her to walk a little faster. She gave a start. "I have never heard a sound like that waterfall before," she explained; "I am almost afraid of it."

"You'll soon grow used to it," said the mother; "you'd get quite to miss it at last."

"Do you really think so?" queried Eli.

"Ah! we shall see, sure enough," said Margit; and she smiled. "Come," she went on; and they turned into the farm from the road. "First we'll look at the cattle. These trees on both sides of the way here Nils planted; he was always wanting to have the place look nice, was Nils; and so's Arne too. Look at the garden he's made there."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Eli, darting up to the garden fence. She had often seen Kampen, but never so near as now; so she hadn't had a glimpse of the garden at all before.

"We'll look at it presently," said Margit.

Eli glanced furtively through the windows, as they passed the house. There was no one within.

They went and stood at the barn door, and looked at the cows as they went lowing by to their stalls. Margit named each by it's name to Eli, telling her how much milk each one gave, which of them would calve that summer and which not. The sheep were counted and penned in; they were of a large, strange breed, for Arne had taken a couple of lambs from the south.

"He takes great pains with all that sort of thing, though you mightn't think it of him," said Margit.

Next they went into the barn and looked at the hay,

which was already carted in; Eli had to smell it, of course, "for such hay," as the mother said, "was not to be found everywhere." She pointed out the different fields through the window-hole of the barn, telling her what crops each one bore, and how much was sown of each kind. And now they went towards the house. Eli, who had answered nothing to all Margit said hitherto, asked as they passed the garden if she might not go into it. Being allowed to do so, she next asked leave to pluck just a flower or two. There was a little bench in one corner; she seated herself on it, apparently only to try it, for she got up again at once.

"We must hurry now, if we don't want to be very late," said Margit, standing in the doorway; and at this they went in.

Margit asked Eli if she might not give her something to eat and drink, as this was the first time she had crossed their threshold; but Eli turned red, and immediately declined. She turned and looked round her. She was in the room they used in the day time; it was not large, but it was cosy-looking, with its timepiece, its tiled stove, and its windows that faced the road. Nils' fiddle, old and time-stained, but with new strings, hung there, as did a couple of guns that belonged to Arne, his English fishing-rod, and other precious objects, which the mother took down and showed her. Eli looked at them, and touched them. The room was not painted, for Arne disliked painted walls; neither was the other room, which looked out upon the ravine, with the bright, clear mountain-peak far away behind. This apartment, which was an addition to the original building—as was quite half that side of the house—was larger and handsomer than the other; but in the two smaller rooms of the wing the walls and ceilings were painted, for that was where the mother was to live when she got old, and he took to himself a wife. They went into the kitchen, the pantry, the wash-house. Not a single word

did Eli say, but she looked at everything as if from a distance. Even when Margit handed her something to look at, she put out her hand indeed, but scarcely touched it. Margit, talking to her the whole way, took her back to the house again: they must go up and look at the higher storey.

Up there were tidy rooms that corresponded to those down below, but they looked new, and not lived in, except one that faced the ravine. In this room there lay about, or hung on the walls, all sorts of household goods that were not required for daily use. There were a whole row of fur coverlets and bed-clothes; these the mother took hold of and lifted one after another, and bade Eli do so too. The girl seemed now to have plucked up heart a little more, or else she took more interest in things like these, for some of them she went back to more than once, asking questions, and growing brighter and brighter. Presently the mother said, "Now we'll go, last of all, to Arne's own room," and they went into the one facing the waterfall. The thunderous voice of the torrent smote upon them through the open window. Up at the height they were, they could see jets and spray from the cascade amid the crags, but not the water of the fall itself, save at one place further up, where a huge bit of rock had broken loose, at the very spot where the torrent came rushing along, gathering all its strength for the last leap into the depths below. Fresh green turf had covered the upper surface of the rocky wall, and down into it a handful of fir-cones had dived, throwing their heads heavenward again, with their roots deep in the rifts of stone. The wind had dashed upon the trees, shaking them with all its might; the spray of the torrent had washed against their stems, so that not a twig was to be seen within four ells of their roots: they stood there as if with knees crippled and bent, and gnarled and knotted were the branches of them; but yet, stand firmly there

they did, thrusting their heads aloft 'mid the mountain walls. They were the first that Eli saw from the window, and next she saw the shining white snow-peaks that rose above the green. She turned aside her eyes: over the fields lay peace and fruitfulness. And now at last she looked round the room where she stood, for the torrent had forbidden her doing so at first.

How calm and tranquil it was in here, contrasted with the tumult without! She singled out no special thing to gaze at, for everything in the room seemed to be in harmony, and nearly all of it was a new thing to her; for Arne had put his heart's love into that room, so that, poor as it was, it had been made as beautiful in almost every least particular as might well be. It seemed to her that his verses came singing in as she stood there, or that he himself smiled at her from everything. The first thing her mind took singly in was a large, handsome, and finely-carven bookcase. There were so many books in it that she thought the pastor himself could scarcely have more. Next, a handsome chest caught her attention. He had many a precious thing in that, his mother told her; there, too, he kept his money, she added, in a whisper. Twice had they had a legacy, she told her, a little later; once more they were to do so, if all went as it should. "But money," she said, "is not the best thing in the world: he's got the power to get what's better."

There were many little nick-nacks about the room that were well worth looking at, and Eli looked at them all, as happy and bright as a child.

Margit patted her on the shoulder. "I've never seen you before to-day, child," she said, "and yet I feel so fond of you;" and she looked lovingly into her eyes. Before Eli had time to blush, she nudged her gently, and went on:

"Look at that little red chest there; there's something precious in that, you may be sure."

Eli looked at it; it was a little square box that she would much have liked to have of her own.

"He doesn't want me to know," whispered the mother, "what there is in that box; and he hides away the key every time." So saying, she went to some clothes that were hanging on the wall, took down a velvet waistcoat, felt in the watch-pocket, and drew out the key.

"Come, now," she whispered; "come and see!"

Eli thought what the mother was now doing was not at all right; but women are women, and both these two walked softly up to the little chest and knelt down before it. But the moment the mother raised the lid, such a pleasant odour arose that Eli clasped her hands together in delight before she saw a single thing. At the top lay a kerchief, spread out over everything; and this Margit now drew aside. "Look, look now!" she whispered, and drew forth a fine black silk kerchief, but not one of the kind worn by men.

"That's just fit for a girl," said the mother; "and nere's another."

Eli took hold of it involuntarily, and the other declared she must try it on her, though the girl objected and turned away her head. The mother folded it up carefully again.

"Look at this!" she cried, drawing forth a handful of beautiful silk ribbons; "all just as if for a girl, isn't it?"

Eli was fiery red now, but she uttered not a sound; her bosom was heaving, her eyes downcast, her whole being showed anxious unrest.

"There's more yet!" went on Margit, drawing out some handsome black velvet, evidently meant for a dress. "This is fine indeed"—and she held it up to the light.

Eli's hands were trembling a little when the mother bade her feel it; she felt the blood rushing to her head, and she seemed to want to turn away, but not to have the power to.

"He's bought something each time he's been to the town," said Margit.

Eli could scarcely hold out much more now, she felt; her glance flitted from one thing in the chest to another, and then back again to the velvet; but indeed she no longer saw anything. But the mother went on with what she was doing. The last thing she took up was wrapped in many papers; she unfolded them one after another, so arousing Eli's curiosity that she got more and more excited; at last appeared a pair of little shoes. Neither Eli nor Margit had ever seen their like; the mother, indeed, declared she would not have believed such things could be made. Not a word said the girl, but when the shoes were given her to hold she closed her five little fingers tight on them, and then felt so ashamed of herself that she was like to weep: she would have given anything to go away, but she dared not trust herself to speak, she dared not cause the mother to look up. Margit, indeed, was fully taken up with what she herself was doing.

"Doesn't it look," she said, "just as if he had bought all these things, one after another, for someone he did not dare give them to?" and she went on putting them all carefully back in the places she had taken them from: she had evidently had practice. "Now let's see what's in the secret compartment here," she went on, and opened it with much care, as there really was some great thing coming now. There lay a buckle, broad, as if for a belt. This was the first thing she called Eli's attention to, and next to a pair of gold rings fastened together; and then Eli saw a velvet-bound hymn-book with silver clasps, and after that nothing more, for she had seen engraved on the silver clasp of the hymn-book, in finely-wrought characters:

"ELI BAARDSDATTER BÖEN."

The mother urged her to look at the other things; she

got no answer, but she saw tear after tear roll down on the silk covering, and stream over it. She put back the brooch she was holding up, closed the box again, turned, and clasped Eli to her heart. And the daughter wept there, and the mother wept over her, and neither of them said a word.

A little while after, Eli was walking in the garden alone: the mother had gone to the kitchen to prepare something especially nice, for Arne would soon be back now. Presently she went out into the garden for Eli; she saw her sitting, leaning towards the ground, writing on the sandy soil. She rubbed it out with her foot when she saw Margit coming, and looked up at her smiling, but she had evidently been weeping.

"You've nothing to cry for, my child," said Margit, and patted her cheeks.

They saw something black among the bushes by the road. Into the house darted Eli, and after her Margit. There was quite a little banquet spread within, with its cream pudding, smoked meat, and cakes; but not a glance did it get from Eli: she went and sat on a chair in the corner, against the wall, and under the clock, and started if she but heard a mouse stirring. The mother sat down by the table. They heard a man's step on the stone flags, then a light, quick step in the passage; the door opened, and Arne came in. The first thing he saw was Eli in the corner by the clock; he let go the door-handle and stood motionless. Thereon Eli's confusion was even greater than before; she got up, repented having done so, and turned her face to the wall.

"*You* here!" said Arne, as if to himself, blushing fiery red as he spoke.

She raised one hand and held it before her, as one does when the sun shines too dazzlingly in one's eyes.

"Why——?" he broke off, but he made a step or two

towards her; she lowered her hand again, turned to him with bowed head, and burst into tears.

"God bless you, Eli!" said he, and he put his arms round her; she leant her head on his breast. He whispered something in her ear; she made no answer, but clasped him round the neck with her two arms.

Long stood they thus, with not a sound to be heard, save the torrent's eternal admonition. Suddenly somebody seemed to be crying on the other side of the table; Arne looked up; it was his mother, whom he had not seen in the room till then.

"Now I'm *sure* you won't go away from me, Arne," said she, coming over to where he stood. Her tears were flowing fast, but that did her good, she said.

As they walked home together in the fair summer evening, they could not utter many words to one another in their strange new happiness. Nature herself interpreted their hearts to one another, in her tranquil, shining, magnificent companionship. But on his way home from their first summer-night's walk, towards the rising sun it was that Arne, as he walked, composed a song, which, though he had not time then to complete it, he perfected soon after, and made it his daily hymn for a season:

"Once I thought that I really might grow to be great,
If afar in the world I might grapple with fate;
And I recked not of friend, and I recked not of foe,
While my heart was aflame with a yearning to go.
But sudden mine eye met a girl's soft glance,
And straight died my longing for flight;
And it seems to me now that the fairest on earth
Were to live in that dear maid's sight.

"Once I thought that I really might grow to be great,
If afar in the world I might grapple with fate;
For the voice of Ambition cried loudly 'Arise,
Young spirit! and struggle thy best for the prize.'

But that maiden she taught me (with never a word)
That the dearest of things God can give
Is not to be famous, renownèd, or great,
But perfect in manhood to live.

"Once I thought that I really might grow to be great,
If afar in the world I might grapple with fate;
But to do aught at home I should never be bold,
For all I met here were misjudging and cold.
But when I saw her, and her sweet, bright love,
And her radiant, pure-hearted glee,
And I knew that her joy and her heart—all—was mine,
Ah! to live was a glory to me!"

After that there was many a summer's evening walk followed by many a song. Here is one such:

"Whence come's this sudden change I find?
No flood has been, no angry wind;
And yet my gently wand'ring course
Now rushes with a torrent's force
Mightily to the mighty sea.

"Can something in Life's self, indeed,
Give to a man at utmost need
An earnest strength, yet tender heart,
That peril, care, and Love's own smart
Encompass, as with bridal chains?

"Sends Life to me such promise rare
As now I feel,—strong, helpful, fair?
Then must some God this thing have willed
Ordaining, 'Be My word fulfilled,'
Wafting me soft to joy for aye."

But perhaps nothing expressed his deep sense of thankfullness so well as the following:

"The might that I got from my power to sing
Made Life's joy and Life's pain
Fall like sunshine and rain
On my soul, in its first fresh years of spring.

So in sorrow or glee
No harm I knew,
While my song might be
Of my own Love true.

"The might that I got from my power to sing
Made me love young and old,
Made me urgent and bold,
Spite of self, to prize love beyond all other thing.
On, on did I roam
Every barrier through,
Till at last I reached home
And my own Love true.

"The might that I got from my power to sing
Must help me to cheer
Those who wander in fear,
And shall lead them to share the glad tiding I bring.
Joy perfecter never
To man can be due,
Than carolling ever
His own Love true."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### "After many Days."

IT was autumn-time, and the harvest was beginning to be garnered. The day was bright and clear, and the air mild as in summer-time, for it had been raining the night before and in the morning. Though it was Saturday, many boats were making their way over the Black Water to the church—the men in shirt-sleeves rowing, the women sitting in the bows and stern, with bright-coloured handkerchiefs thrown over their heads. Many more boats, however, seemed to be on their way to Böen, to row out again from it in a long and large procession; for to-day Baard Böen was to celebrate the marriage of his daughter Eli with Arne Nilsson Kampen.

All doors stood open: people were constantly in and out: children, with bits of cake in their hands, fearing for their new clothes, and looking shyly at one another, all about the farmyard. An old woman sat on the granary steps by herself: it was Margit Kampen. She was wearing a large silver ring that had several smaller ones fastened to its upper round; every now and then she looked at it. Nils had given it her the day she became his wife, and she had never worn it since.

Within, in the two or three sitting-rooms, the steward and two young bridesmen—Eli's brother and the pastor's son—were busily going about handing refreshments to the guests that came streaming in to the great wedding. Up in Eli's room sat the bride, the pastor's wife, and Mathilde, who had come from the town on purpose to dress the bride; for that the two girls had promised to do, the one for the other, ever since they were children. Arne, in his smartest of clothes, his round, well-fitting jacket, and a collar that Eli herself had worked for him, was downstairs, in the room with the window that Eli had once written "Arne" on. It was open, and by it he stood, leaning against the frame and looking out over the still water at the parsonage and the church.

Out in the passage just then two persons met one another, both of whom had just come from their work. One of them was fresh from the landing-stage, where he had been arranging the boats for the church. He was wearing a round black cloth jacket and blue freize breeches, the dye from which had made his hands all blue; his white collar set off his fair face and long, yellow hair; his high forehead looked serene, and on his lips played a smile. This was Baard. The person he met in the passage had just come from the kitchen. She was dressed for the church; her figure looked slender and stately, and she walked self-consciously and slowly through the doorway. When she met Baard, she paused, and her lips puckered up at one side a little: it was Birgit, his wife. Each had something to say to the other, but the only sign of it was that both came to a standstill. Baard was more confused than she, but he smiled more and more, and his evident and great confusion came to his aid, for, without more ado, he began to go up the stairs, with a "perhaps you'll come too."

She followed him. In the garret up there they were

alone by themselves; but yet Baard locked the door behind her, and allowed himself plenty of time. When at last he turned away from it, Birgit was by the window, looking out, so as not to see what was going on in the room.

Baard drew forth a little flask from his breast-pocket, and a little silver cup. He offered it to his wife, but she refused it, in spite of his assurance that it was wine sent them from the parsonage. He then drank some himself, though, as he drank, he kept on pressing her to share it. At length he corked the flask again, put it away with the little silver cup in his breast-pocket, and seated himself on a box. It evidently annoyed him that his wife would not drink with him.

He drew a long, deep breath again and again. Birgit was leaning against the window-frame just in front of him, one hand resting on it. Baard had something to say, but to say it now was harder than ever.

"Birgit," he began, "you've been thinking to-day as I've been, I dare say." He heard her shift from one side of the window to the other, and then rest on her arm again. "You guess what I mean," he went on. "He stood between us two, I know. I thought that would go on till our marriage, but it's gone on much longer."

He heard her quick breathing; he saw her fidget about again, but he could not see her face. He himself was undergoing such a struggle that he had to dry his face with his coat-sleeve. After long wrestling he began again:

"To-day a son of his, handsome and clever, has come into our house, and to him we have given our only daughter. . . . . How would it be, Birgit, if we too were to join our hearts to-day? "

His voice trembled away, and he cleared his throat. Birgit, who had been fidgetting uneasily, laid her head on her arm again, but said nothing. Long Baard waited, listening to her breathing. He got no answer, and he had no more to say. He looked up, his face growing paler and paler; but she did not even turn her head. At last he rose. At that same moment came a gentle rap on the door, and a soft voice asked:

"Aren't you coming, mother?"

It was Eli; and there was something in the voice that made Baard involuntarily stand still, and involuntarily look at Birgit. Birgit, too, raised her head. She looked towards the door, and her eyes met Baard's white face.

"Aren't you coming, mother?" cried the voice from without, once more.

"Yes, I'm coming now, dear!" said Birgit, in a choking voice; and with firm step she walked across the room to Baard, took his hand in hers, and broke into violent sobs. The two hands clung tight together: time-worn hands they were now; but firmly they clasped each other, as if each had been seeking the other for twenty years. Hand in hand were they still, as they went to open the door; and presently, too, when the bridal train streamed down to the landing-stage, and Arne gave his hand to Eli, leading the way, Baard, against all use and custom, seeing it, took his wife's hand in his own, and followed them—calmly, happily, smiling. But behind them came Margit Kampen—alone, as was her wont.

Baard was beside himself with joy on that day; as he sat chatting with the rowers, one of them, looking at the mountains behind them, remarked how wonderful it was that even rocky crags like those could be clad in foliage.

"Ah!" said Baard, "it must grow up over it, whether it will or no." And his eyes wandered over the wedding party till they rested on the bridal pair and his wife. "Ah!" he added, "no one would have thought such a thing possible—twenty years ago."

# THE FISHER LASSIE.

# THE FISHER LASSIE.

## CHAPTER I.

### GUNLAUG OF THE HILL.

WHEN the herring has fixed upon any place along the coast for its constant and regular haunt, a town grows up there bit by bit, if it is otherwise a likely place. Towns such as these may not only be said to have been actually cast up by the sea, but even still, at some distance off, look like bits of wreckage or timber that the waves have washed ashore; or like upturned boats, under which the fishermen have crept for shelter against the stormy night. Draw nearer, and you will see in what a casual fashion the town has been built: crags lie in the midst of thoroughfares; the sea divides the hamlet into three or four parts; and the streets curve and wind about at will.

But one property is possessed by all these towns alike: they have shelter in the harbours for the largest ships; within them, the water is smooth as in a basin; and therefore these inlets are very welcome to vessels that come with sails torn, and bulwarks shattered, scudding away from the high seas to seek for breathing-time.

In such townlets, all is stillness: everything that is a source of noise is relegated to the quays, where the villagers' boats lie fast, and ships load and unload.

In our little town, the only street runs along the quays, facing which are white and red-painted houses, one or two storeys high, with walls not touching one another, but with bright strips of garden in between, the whole forming a long and broad road, on which you get the scent of whatever happens to be on the quays, if the wind is blowing from the sea.

All is quiet here—not from fear of the policeman, for as a rule there is none—but from fear of what people say, for everybody in the place is known to everybody else. Should you walk down the street, you must give a greeting at every window you pass, and the old dame sitting at it will pleasantly greet you in return. Exchange a greeting, too, with everyone you meet; for all these quiet folk go about their business considering what is the most fitting conduct for the world in general and for themselves in particular, and anyone who oversteps the limits proper to his rank and station in life, loses his good name; for not alone is *he* known, but his father and his grandfather before him; and immediately folks set themselves to find out if, at any previous time, any tendency towards impropriety has been manifested in the family.

To our quiet town there came many years ago a man much respected by all, Per[1] Olsen by name. He had come from the country, where he had earned his livelihood as a pedlar and fiddler, and he opened a shop in the town for his old customers, selling bread and brandy in addition to his pedlar's wares. You might hear him walking up and down in the back room behind the shop, playing jigs and wedding marches. Every time, as he passed the door, he

[1] An humbler and more familiar form of Peter.

peeped through the glass panels, and if he caught sight of a customer coming, he finished up his tune with a flourish and went into the shop.

His business prospered, he married, and had a son, whom he called after himself, naming him, however, not "Per," but "Peter."

Little Peter was to be what Per felt he himself was not —a cultivated man; and with this end in view the boy was sent to the Latin school.[1]

The lads who ought to have been his comrades beat him home from their games, because he was the son of Per Olsen; and Per Olsen beat him back again to them, because it was impossible for him to be educated otherwise. In consequence, little Peter, finding himself isolated at school, grew so idle, and by degrees so completely inured to the whole affair, that his father could strike neither tear nor smile out of him; so Per gave up the beating process, and put him into the shop.

Judge of his surprise when he saw the lad serve every customer with exactly what he asked for, never giving a grain too much, nor ever himself eating so much as a currant; weighing, counting, or invoicing, with immovable countenance; never talking, if he could avoid so doing; very slow in all his movements, but unimpeachable in his exactitude.

Then the father's hope sprang up anew, and he sent him (in a fishing-boat) to Hamburg, that he might go into the Commercial Institute and learn good manners.

After eight months' absence—long enough, in all conscience—he returned, provided with six new suits, which, when he landed, he wore one over the other: "for what one wears and walks in," as the saying is, "pays no Custom-house duty."

Next day, when he was seen in the street, he had lost

[1] The Latin school, *i.e.*, the school for the children of the higher classes.

some of his bulk, but otherwise he looked much the same. He walked stiff and straight, holding his hands close by his sides; he saluted with a sudden jerk, bowing as if deprived of the use of his joints, and immediately becoming quite stiff again. He was politeness personified, but silent in his manners, and, after a fashion, shy.

His name he no longer wrote "Olsen," but "Ohlsen," which gave the town wag a chance for the following display of wit: *Question.* "How far did Peter Olsen get in Hamburg?" *Answer.* "As far as the letter H." He had had thoughts of calling himself "Pedro," but he suffered so much annoyance for the sake of an H, that he gave up that idea, and wrote himself "P. Ohlsen."

He did much to extend his father's business, and when only in his two-and-twentieth year he married a red-handed shopkeeper's lass, that he might have someone to look after the household: for the father had just become a widower, and a wife is more trustworthy than a housekeeper. Just a year after their marriage, she bore him a son, who, within a week of his birth, was named Pedro.

Now that worthy Per Olsen was a grandfather, he felt an inner call to become old; so he handed the business over to his son, took his seat on a bench in the open air, and smoked twist out of a short pipe. And when one day he began to grow somewhat weary of his life, he uttered a wish that he might soon die, and this wish of his was as quietly granted as all the rest of his desires had been.

Now, just as the son Peter had inherited one side exclusively of his father's powers, viz., his business aptitude, so the grandson Pedro seems to have been sole heir to the other—his musical faculties. It was long before he learned to read, but he very quickly knew how to sing. He played the flute so well that it could not escape notice. He was weak of sight and yielding in disposition. All this, however, only vexed the father, who wanted the boy to possess

his own punctilious accuracy; so if ever he neglected anything, he was not scolded and beaten, as his father had been, but pinched. This was done in a quiet, an affable, well-nigh a polite manner; but it was done on the very smallest provocation. Every night as the mother undressed him, she counted and kissed the blue and yellow marks, but she made no resistance, for she herself knew what it was to be pinched. For every rent in his clothes—which were those his father had brought from Hamburg, cut down and altered for the son's use—for every smudge on his school-books, she had to bear the blame. Hence all day long it was "Don't do that, Pedro!" "Take care, Pedro!" "Mind what you're doing, Pedro!" till the boy grew afraid of his father and weary of his mother. Among his schoolmates he came to no particular harm, because he always fell a-crying, begging them not to hurt his clothes: they nicknamed him "Touchwood," and troubled themselves no more about him. He was like a sickly, featherless duckling, ever limping along behind the rest of the brood, and sneaking quickly off with any little bit he could steal for himself: nobody shared with him, and so he shared with nobody.

But he soon found out that it was very different for him among the poor children of the town; they had far more patience with him, because he was better off than themselves. A tall, strongly-built lass, who was queen of the whole crew, took a liking to him. He was never tired of looking at her. She had raven black hair that curled about her head, and was never combed save by her fingers; eyes of perfect blue beneath her narrow forehead, and an expression that betokened single-hearted determination. She was always actively engaged, whether in sport or in work, going about in summer-time with arms and legs bare, and face tanned by the sun, while in winter her clothing was such as others wear in summer. Her father was a

pilot and fisherman: she dashed about selling his fish, holding his boat still against wind and tide, and—when he was away acting as pilot—did the fishing alone. No one who saw her could help turning round and taking another look at her, she seemed such a picture of self-reliance. Her name was Gunlaug, but she was called "The Fisher Lassie," a name she accepted as a title proper to her rank. In all games she was always to be found on the weaker side; she seemed to need somebody to care for, so now she took charge of this sickly boy. In her boat he might blow his flute, which was forbidden him at home, because it was believed to divert his thoughts from his lessons. She used to row him out on the fjord; she began to take him out with her on longer fishing expeditions; and, before long, let him accompany her on her night tours as well. On such occasions they rowed off in the silent summer twilight as the sun sank to rest, and he would play his flute, or listen to her as she told him all the tales that she knew of mermen and of monsters, of strange adventures, foreign lands, and black men, just as the sailors had told them to her. She shared her food with him just as she did her knowledge, and he partook of both alike without making any return; for he had neither eatables to bring with him from home, nor fancy from school. They rowed till the sun went down behind the snow-capped hills, and then anchored off some craggy islet, where they landed and made a fire; that is to say, she collected sticks and branches, he sat and looked on. She brought one of her father's seaman's jackets and a blanket in the boat with her, and in these she wrapped him round. She looked after the fire and he went to sleep, while she kept herself awake by singing bits of psalms and songs; she sang in a clear firm voice until he fell asleep, and then she sang in a lower tone. When the sun rose again across the water, darting pale yellow rays over the mountain-tops to herald

his approach, she would wake him. The woods still stood in blackness, and the country still lay darkened, but began to be reddish and glowing until the ridge of hills shone clear, and every colour gleamed forth bright and distinct. Then they dragged the boat into the water again, and quickly it shot through the waves before the fresh morning breeze, and soon it lay moored among the other fishing-boats.

When the winter came, and the expeditions came to an end, he used to visit her at her home. He would often sit looking at her as she worked, but neither he nor she spoke much; it was as if they were sitting together waiting for summer. But alas! when it came, their hopes were destined to come to naught, for Gunlaug's father died, and she left the town, while the boy, at his schoolmaster's advice, was put into the shop. There he stood beside his mother, for little by little the father had become the colour of the groats he was always weighing out, and was at last obliged to keep to his bed in the back room; yet he still wished to take part in all that went on and to know what sales each of them made. He would act as if he did not hear, until he got them near enough, and then pinch them. At length the oil ran quite dry in this little lamp one night, and the light flickered out. The wife wept, hardly knowing why she did so, but the son had not a tear to squeeze forth. Having money enough to live on, they gave up the business, removed everything that might have reminded them of it, and made the shop into a sitting-room; there the mother sat by the window and knitted stockings, while Pedro sat in the room on the other side of the passage and blew his flute. But as soon as the summer came, he bought a little light sailing-boat, bent his course to the rocky islet, and lay where Gunlaug had lain.

One day, as he lay there among the heather, he saw a boat steering straight for him; it brought up close by his

resting-place, and out stepped Gunlaug. She had not altered at all, save that she was full-grown, and taller than other women; but as her eyes fell upon him, she turned aside a little and slackened her pace, for it had never occurred to her that he was now a man.

The thin, mealy face was unknown to her, for it was no longer ailing and delicate-looking; it was dull and heavy; but as he looked at her, his eyes were lit up as if by the light of his former dreams, and as she advanced, for every step she came it seemed as if a year fell from him, and when she stood by him he had sprung up and stood laughing and talking like a boy. Beneath the old face lay the visage of a child; he had got older, it is true, but he had not grown up.

Such as he was, it was just such a child she was seeking, though now that she had found him again, she hardly knew what more she would have. She laughed and blushed. Involuntarily he seemed to feel a sort of power within him; it was the first time in his life, and at that instant he was actually handsome; it lasted perhaps more than a moment, but in that moment she was captivated.

Gunlaug was one of those natures that can only love whatever is weak, whatever they have borne in their arms. She had meant to stay in the town two days,—she remained two months.

In those two months he developed more than in all the rest of his life. He was so far aroused from his dreamy apathy as to form plans for the future: he decided that he would go away and learn music! But when he talked of this to her one day, she turned pale, and said, "Yes; but first we must be married!"

He looked at her, and she looked steadfastly back at him; both blushed red as fire; and then, "What will people say to that?" said he.

It had never occurred to Gunlaug that his wishes could

be other than hers, just because her wishes had till then never been other than his. But now it flashed upon her that, deep down in his heart, he had never for an instant had any intention of sharing anything with her, except what *she* gave him. In that instant it stood revealed to her that it had been so in all their intercourse. She had begun by pitying, and ended by loving, the being she herself had fostered. Ah! if now she had only exercised a moment's self-control!—for he saw her anger blazing up, and in fear he cried out, "I will!" She heard him; but her anger at her own blindness and his littleness, at her own shame and his cowardice, seethed up with burning speed to boiling point, and never did a love that began in childhood in the evening sunshine, that had been rocked on the billows beneath the rays of the moon and accompanied by the melody of the flute and of soft singing, come to a more pitiable ending. She grasped him with both her hands, she raised him from the ground, and struck him with all the passion of her heart; then she rowed straight back to the town, and, never swerving, took her course over the hills.

He had sailed out a youth deep in love, and on his way to achieve manhood; he returned an old man, for whom manhood had never been. His life had but one memory, and that he had in his folly thrown away: one spot only on earth did he care for, and thither no longer durst he go. Brooding over his own misery and how it had come upon him, his new-born vigour sank as in a quagmire, never to emerge again. The little town boys soon noticed his strange bearing, and began to plague him; and as he was an obscure person to his fellow-townsmen, who knew neither what he lived on nor how, it fell out that he found no one to defend him. Before long he no longer dared to venture out—at any rate, not in the public thoroughfares. His whole existence became a warfare with the boys, who

were, perhaps, of the same use as flies are in the heat of summer; without them he would have sunk into complete torpor.

Nine years later Gunlaug came back to the town just as unexpectedly as she had left it. She was accompanied by a little girl about eight years of age, who looked just as Gunlaug used to in former days, save that she was more delicate in her features and bearing, and had a look about her as if she had stepped out of a dream. Gunlaug had been married, it was said; she had inherited some money, and had come back to the town to open an inn for seamen. She managed her house in such a way that merchants and skippers came to her to hire sailors, and sailors came to her to get hired. Besides this, all the town ordered fish of her. And though she never took a shilling for her services as agent, she wielded despotically the power her position gave her. Certainly she was the most influential person in the town, though she was a woman, and a woman, too, who never left her own house. She was known as "Fish-Gunlaug," or "Gunlaug of the Hill"; while the title of "The Fisher Lassie" descended to her little daughter, who was always to be found skipping about at the head of the small boys of the town.

*Her* history it is which we are about to tell. She had something of her mother's strong nature, and she had occasion to use it.

## CHAPTER II.

### PETRA'S CHILDHOOD.

THE many pretty gardens of the town, now clad in their second and third blossoms, were fragrant after the rain. The sun was sinking to rest behind the everlasting mountains of snow and the whole heavens far around seemed all on fire, making even the snow-peaks give back a subdued reflection. The nearer mountains stood in the shadow, but were bright, notwithstanding, with many-hued autumnal foliage. The rocky islets with their dense woods, coming one after another in the middle of the fjord, like a stream of boats rowing in, afforded a still stronger display of colour, for they were not so far off. The sea was still as glass: a big ship was slowly being towed in. People were sitting about on the wooden steps before their doors, where the rose-bushes grew thick about them: they were talking to one another from door to door, running over to each other's dwellings, or exchanging greetings with the passers-by, who were on their way to the long, leafy lanes beyond the town. Here and there a piano might be heard through an open window: save that, no sound broke upon their talk. The last gleams of the setting sun over the sea seemed to add to the feeling of utter calm.

All of a sudden, there arose a sound in the middle of the town as if it were being stormed. Boys were screaming, girls crying, other boys hurrahing, old women scolding and shrieking out orders; the policeman's big dog was barking his loudest, and every dog in the town barked in answer. Nobody that heard it could stop indoors. So great was the uproar, that the Amtmand[1] himself turned on his threshold, and was heard to say, "Why, there must be something the matter!"

"What is it?" was the constant question of those who came from the lanes to those on the steps.

"Dear me! what can it be?" everyone was asking now, whenever anybody came from the middle of the town.

But the town lies in a half-moon along a gently-curving bay, and so it was a good while before those at each end had heard the answer:

"Oh! it's only the Fisher Lassie!"

That venturesome spirit, bold in the protection of a redoubtable mother, and sure of help from every seaman in the town (for such service always got them a free dram from Gunlaug,) had put herself at the head of her horde of small boys, and fallen upon a great apple-tree in Pedro Ohlsen's garden.

The plan of assault was as follows: certain of the boys were to lure Pedro to the front of the house by making his rose-bush beat against his window; at the same time, one of the others was to shake the apple-tree, which stood in the midst of the garden, and the rest were to throw the apples over the fence in all directions—not to steal them—far from it!—but just for fun. This ingenious plan had that very evening been hatched behind Pedro's garden; but as luck would have it, Pedro himself happened to be sitting on the other side of the fence, and heard every word!

[1] Magistrate.

Somewhat before the appointed time, he got the town policeman (a tippling fellow) and his big dog into his back parlour, where he gave both of them refreshment. When the Fisher Lassie's curly black hair was seen above the palings, and a number of little faces peeped over on every side, Pedro let the young scamps in front of the house dash his rose-bushes against the window-panes to their heart's content, while he quietly waited in the room at the back of the house. But when they had all gathered in perfect silence round the tree, and the Fisher Lassie, with bare arms and scratched legs, had climbed up to shake it, the garden door suddenly sprang open, and Pedro and the policeman dashed out with sticks in their hands and the huge dog close behind them!

A scream of terror rose from among the boys. A lot of little girls, who were innocently playing "touch" on the other side of the fence, thought that somebody was being murdered in the garden, and began crying in the most heartrending way. The boys who had escaped shouted "Hurrah!"; those who were still struggling over the fence screamed under the blows of the cudgels; and, to complete the confusion, there arose from the depths certain old women—they always do, when boys begin to shriek—and joined in the chorus. Pedro and the policeman were dismayed themselves at the uproar, and tried to still the old women: meanwhile, the boys took to their heels, and the dog (whom most they feared) dashed over the fence after them—that was *his* part of the game! And now the screams, the boys, the girls, and the dog, flew like wildfire all over the town.

All this time, the Fisher Lassie had been sitting quite still up in the tree, thinking that nobody had noticed her; crouching up at the very top, she could follow through the leaves the course of the fray. But as soon as the policeman had in desperation gone out to the old women,

and Pedro Ohlsen was alone in the garden, he came right under the tree, looked up, and shouted:

"Come down with you at once, you rascal!"

Not a sound from the tree.

"Will you come down, I say? I know you're up there!"

Still unbroken silence.

"I shall go and get my gun and shoot you! I will!" and he made a movemement as if to go.

"Boo-hoo-hoo!" came a sound from the tree.

"Yes, you may well begin to squall! You shall get a whole barrel full of shot in you, you shall!"

"Oo-hoo, oo-hoo!" cried a voice like an owl's; "I am so frightened!"

"Ah! it's you, you little devil, is it? You're the worst limb of mischief of the whole lot; but I've got you now!

"Oh! dear, good kind sir! I'll never do it again!" and at the same moment she flung a rotten apple clean in his face, and a peal of laughter accompanied it.

The apple burst all over him, and while he was wiping it off, she slipped down from the tree, and was struggling over the palings before he could get near her. She would have got right off in safety, if she had not been so afraid of his being close behind her that she slipped back in her haste.

As soon as he touched her, she gave a scream—a scream so piercing, loud, thrilling, and shrill, that he was quite taken aback, and let go his hold. At her signal of distress, people began to gather round the fence. She heard this, and plucked up courage straightway.

"Let me go!" she threatened, "or I'll tell mother!" and her face was now all a-blaze with passion.

*Then* he knew that look, and shouted wildly: "Your mother! who *is* your mother?"

"Gunlaug, Gunlaug of the Hill, Fish-Gunlaug," re-

iterated the girl in triumph, for she saw he was frightened.

Nearsighted as he was, he had never seen the child till now, and was the only person in the town who did not know who she was; he did not even know that Gunlaug was in the town.

"What is your name?" he cried, like one possessed.

"Petra!" came the answer, in still higher tones.

"Petra!" cried Pedro—and turned and dashed into the house as if he had spoken with the fiend.

Now, the paleness of fear is very like that of anger: Petra thought he had gone for his gun; terror seized her —already she felt the shots pursuing her. The garden gate had at that moment been burst open from the outside, and she dashed off through it, with her black hair streaming wildly behind her, her eyes flashing fire, and the dog, whom she had set following and baying after her. Thus she burst upon her mother, who was coming from the kitchen with a bowl of soup, and down went the girl, with the soup all over her and the floor.

"Drat the girl!" from Gunlaug.

But, lying there in the spilt soup, she cried out: "He's coming to shoot me, mother! he's coming to shoot me!"

"Shoot you! *who's* going to shoot you, you little imp?"

"Pedro Ohlsen—we were taking his apples." She told all aught but the truth.

"Whom are you talking of, child?"

"Of Pedro Ohlsen; he's after me with a big gun! he's coming to shoot me!"

"Pedro Ohlsen!" shrieked the mother; and then she laughed, and seemed somehow to have grown taller.

The child began to whimper and tried to make off; but the mother sprang upon her, with her white teeth shining as if for prey, and, gripping her by the shoulders, stopped her from going.

"Did you say who you were?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!" cried the child, holding up her hands entreatingly.

Then the mother drew herself up to her full height:

"So he has got to know at last! Well, what did he say?"

"He ran in for his gun; he was going to shoot me!"

"*He* shoot *you!*" laughed Gunlaug, in huge scorn; but the child, in great terror, and all bespattered with the soup, had crept away into the corner, and was standing drying her clothes and shedding tears.

"If ever you go near him again," said the mother, coming up to her once more, seizing her and shaking her, "or talk to him, or listen to what he says, may God help both him and you!—Tell him that from me!" she added threateningly, as the child did not at once answer.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!"

"Tell—him—that—from—me!" she repeated once more, in a lower tone, as she walked away, stopping to nod her head at every word.

The child washed herself, changed her clothes, and went and sat out on the steps in her Sunday frock. But when she thought of the peril she had been in, her tears again began to fall.

"What are you weeping for, childie?" asked a voice, more kindly than any she had ever heard before.

She looked up; there stood before her a gracefully-built, intellectual-looking man with spectacles. She stood up at once, for it was Hans Oedegaard, a young man in whose presence everyone in the town stood.

"What are you weeping for, childie?" repeated the voice.

She looked up at him, and said that she and "some other boys" had been trying to get the apples in Pedro Ohlsen's garden; but Pedro and the policeman had come

after them, and- '; but she called to mind that her mother had shaken her faith in the shooting, so she dared not tell that part of the story—she gave a long deep sigh to make up for it.

"Is it possible," cried he, "that a child of your age could think of committing so great a sin?"

Petra stared at him; she knew well enough that it was a sin, but she had always been used to being told so by hearing herself called "You imp of the devil! you black-haired little fiend!" Now, somehow, she felt ashamed.

"How is it you don't go to school and learn God's Commandments to us about what is good and what is evil?"

She stood tugging at her frock, as she made shift to answer that her mother did not want her to go to school.

"You cannot even read, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes," replied she, she could read.

He took out a little book and gave it her. She opened it, turned it over, and then looked at the cover.

"I can't read such fine print," she said.

But he would not let her off so, and straightway she became most marvellously stupid: her eyes and lips drooped, and all her limbs seemed to hang loose.

"T-h-e the, L-o-r-d Lord, G-o-d God, the Lord God, s-a-i-d said, the Lord God said to M—M—M—"

"Good gracious!" he broke in, "you can't even read! And you ten or eleven years old! Wouldn't you be glad to be able to read?"

She managed to jerk out that she would be glad enough.

Come with me, then; we must set to work at once."

She moved away a little, to look into the house.

"Yes, go and tell your mother about it," he said; and just then Gunlaug passed the door. Seeing the child talking with a stranger, she came out on to the flag-stones.

"He wants to teach me to read, mother," said the child, looking at her with doubtful eyes.

The mother made no answer, but set both her arms akimbo, and looked at Oedegaard.

"Your child is very ignorant," said he. "You cannot answer it before God or man for letting her go on so."

"Who are you?" returned Gunlaug, sharply.

"Hans Oedegaard, son of your priest."

Her face cleared a little, for she had heard nothing but good of him.

"When I was at home before," he went on, "I noticed this child. To-day my attention has been called to her afresh. She must no longer accustom herself to doing only what is bad."

"What is that to you?" said the mother's face plainly enough, but he continued quietly:

"Surely you would like her to learn something?"

"No!"

A slight flush passed over his face as he asked:

"Why not?"

"Are folks any the better for learning?"—she had only had one experience of it, but she stuck fast to that.

"I am astonished that anyone can ask such a question."

"Yes, of course; I know you are. I know people are none the better for it;" and she moved to the steps, to put an end to such ridiculous talk.

But he planted himself right in her way.

"Here is a duty," said he, "which you *shall* not pass by. You are a most injudicious mother."

Gunlaug measured him from head to foot.

"Who has told you," said she, "what I am?"

"You—you yourself; just now; or else you must have seen that your child was going on the way to ruin."

Gunlaug turned, and her eye met his; she saw he was in earnest in what he had said, and she began to feel afraid

of him. She had always had to do with seamen and tradesfolk; talk such as his she had never heard.

"What do you want to do with my child?" she asked.

"Teach her what is right for her soul's welfare, and see what is to be made of her."

"My child shall be just what I want."

"No indeed she shan't! she shall be what God wants."

Gunlaug was at a loss what to answer. She drew nearer to him and said:

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," he replied, "she ought to learn whatever her powers allow; for God has given them her for that."

Gunlaug now drew close up to him.

"Am I not to decide what is best for her—I, the child's mother?" she asked, as if really wishing to be informed.

"That you shall; but you must act on the advice of those who know better than you. You must do the Lord's will."

Gunlaug stood still for a moment.

"What if she learns too much?" she said at last—"a poor woman's child," she added, looking tenderly at her daughter.

"If she learns too much for her own rank, she will thereby have attained another," he said.

She grasped his meaning at once, and, looking more and more fondly at her child, she said (as if to herself):

"That is dangerous."

"That is not the question," he returned gently; "the question is, what is right?"

A strange expression came into her keen eyes; she looked at him piercingly, but there was so much earnestness in his voice, his words, and his face, that Gunlaug felt herself conquered. She went up to the child, and laid her hands on her head, but she spoke not a word.

"I shall read with her from now till the the time when

she is confirmed," he said, hoping to make things easier for Gunlaug. "I wish to take charge of the child."

"And do you want to take her away from me?"

He hesitated, and looked at her inquiringly.

"Of course you know far better than I," she said, speaking with difficulty; "but if it hadn't been for what you said about the Lord——" here she stopped. She had been smoothing down her daughter's hair, and now she took off her own kerchief and bound it round Petra's neck. Thus, in no other way, did she say the child was to go with him; but she hastened back into the house, as if she could not bear to see it.

Oedegaard began suddenly to feel afraid of what, in his youthful zeal, he had done. The child, for her part, felt afraid of him, for he was the first person who had ever got the best of her mother. And so, with mutual fears, they went to their first lesson.

Day by day, as it seemed to him, her cleverness and knowledge increased; and it often happened that their conversation seemed, of its own accord, to take one peculiar bent. He would bring before her eyes characters from the Bible or from history, in such a way as to point out to her the call that God had given them. He would tell her of Saul leading his wild life, or of the young David tending his father's flocks, till Samuel came and laid on him the hands of the Lord. But greatest of all was the Call when the Lord walked upon earth, tarried among the fisher-folk, and called them to His work. And the humble fishermen arose and followed after Him—to suffering—yea, even to Death; for the feeling of the holy Call bears men up through all tribulation.

The thought of this took such hold of her that she could not refrain from asking him about her own "Call." He looked steadfastly at her; she grew red beneath his gaze; and then he answered that through work every man finds out

his vocation: that that might be insignificant and unimportant, but that it existed for everyone. Then a great zeal came upon her; it drove her to work with all her might; it entered into her games, and it made her wan and thin.

Strange longings for adventure came over her. O! to cut short her hair, dress like a boy, and go out to take part in the struggle! But when one day her teacher told her that her hair would be so pretty if only she would take a little care of it, she got fond of her long tresses, and for their sake sacrificed her chance of a heroine's fame. After this, to be a girl became a more precious thing to her than ever, and henceforth her work went peacefully on, with the ever-changing dreams of girlhood floating around her.

## CHAPTER III.

### PETRA'S TEACHER.

IN his youth Hans Oedegaard's father had wandered away from his native parish of Bergen, and by the aid of people who had taken to him, he had become a learned man and an able preacher. He was, moreover, a man of authority in deed even more than in word, for he was a deep and resolute thinker. This man who had, by his tough, stout will overcome all the difficulties of his life, was fated to receive a check where least he expected it, and where he felt it most.

He had three daughters and one son. His son Hans was the brightest ornament of his school, and it was the father's daily joy to help him with his lessons. Hans had a friend who, by his aid, kept up with him, and who loved him above all else on earth, save only his mother. The two boys went together to school, and together to the university; together they passed the two preliminary examinations, and now they were about to enter on their professional studies together. One day, after finishing their accustomed portion of reading, as they were merrily going downstairs, Hans in mere joyfulness of heart sprang upon his comrade's back; the latter slipped, and a few days later lay dead. The dying youth begged his mother—a

widow, now about to lose her only child—to grant him the wish of his heart, and let Hans fill her son's place. The mother scarce outlived her son, leaving, by her will, all her property, which was considerable, to Hans Oedegaard.

It was many months ere Hans was at all himself again after this terrible event. A long journey abroad so far restored him as to enable him to go on with his theological studies till he was ready for holy orders; but nothing could induce him to make use of them.

The whole hope of the father's life had been to see his son his helper with his flock, and now it was not possible to get him even to ascend the pulpit; he gave to all entreaty the constant answer—he felt no call. It was a bitter disappointment to the father, and it made him years and years older. He had settled down to his work late in life; he was now quite an old man, and all his work had been done with all his strength and with this one object ever before him. And now in the same house dwelt the son, in his stately suite of rooms above, while down below the father worked strenuously in his little study, with the lamp that lit up the night of his old age beside him. He neither could nor would take the help of a stranger after his disappointment at home, nor would he follow his son's advice and give up work; therefore he knew no rest, summer nor winter. But every year the son's journey abroad grew longer. When he was at home he associated with no one, save that, in more or less silence, he dined daily at his father's table. But anyone who talked to him met ever with such clearness of judgment and zeal for truth that conversation was difficult to maintain. He was never at church, but he gave more than half his income for benevolent purposes, and always with most careful injunctions as to its use.

Charity on such a large scale was a thing so different

from the little town's narrow habits, that it overwhelmed everybody. Besides this, his reserve, his constant journeyings abroad, and the fear all felt of talking with him, made him, as may easily be supposed, a mysterious sort of being in their eyes, and they gave him credit, not only for the common sense and ability he possessed, but for all possible talents as well. When this man, then, condescended to take the "Fisher Lassie" into his daily care, she rose vastly in their estimation.

One after another of them—chiefly women—now tried to look after her as well. She came to him one day, dressed out in all the colours of the rainbow; she had put all her finery on, thinking that now she surely must be looking as he liked to see her, for he always wanted her to look neat. But he no sooner saw her than he forbade her ever to take anything from anybody again. He called her vain and silly; he said that she only gave her mind to foolish objects, and cared for nothing but frivolity. When she came next morning with eyes red with weeping, he took her with him for a walk beyond the town. He told her the story of David; for it was his constant habit to take now one, now another, well-known character and make him live again for her. First he painted him to her as he was in his youth, when he walked fair and strong and in untroubled faith, so that he had earned a triumphal procession, even before he was of man's age. He was a shepherd, yet called to be king; he dwelt in caves and holes, yet in the end he built Jerusalem. In beauteous attire he sat and played to the sick Saul, but when he himself was a king, and sick, he was clad in the sackcloth of repentance as he sat singing and playing to himself. When he had done his great work, he sought ease in sin; but the warning and the punishment fell upon him, and again he was as a child. David, who could upraise the Lord's chosen people by his songs of praise, himself lay crushed at the Lord's

feet. When was he best to see—when, crowned with victory, he danced to his own music before the ark, or when in his own chamber he implored grace at the hand of the chastiser?

That night Petra had a dream which she never forgot all her life after. She was going up, it seemed to her, in a triumphal procession, mounted on a white horse; but at the same time she was in rags, and dancing in front of it.

Some time after this, as she was sitting one evening at the edge of the wood beyond the town, reading her lesson-books, Pedro Ohlsen, who since that day in the garden had been constantly drawing nearer and nearer to her, walked close by her, and, with a curious smile, whispered "Good evening." Although more than a year had gone by, her mother's command to her about talking with him was so strongly impressed on her mind, that she did not answer him. Nevertheless, day after day went by, and ever with the same greeting. At last she grew to expect him, if he did not come. Presently he began to ask some little question or other as he walked by, and before long he managed to get her to talk too. After one such talk he let a silver dollar[1] slip down into her lap, and then dashed off, happy in his success. Now, it was against her mother's order to talk to him; against Oedegaard's to take gifts of anyone. The first she had gradually been drawn into transgressing; and this was brought vividly to her mind now that it had led her to do the same to the other. To get rid of the money, she got hold of another girl and treated her to sweets; but, in spite of their best efforts, it was not possible for them to eat more than four orts' worth. As soon as she had spent the money, she grew angry with herself for not having given it back instead. The remaining ort, as it lay in her pocket, seemed as if it were burning a hole in her clothes: she snatched it out and flung it into the sea.

[1] A silver dollar (five orts) is worth about 4s. 6d.

But not by such means was she quit of the dollar; her thoughts were branded with it. She felt she might once again be free if she were to confess; but her mother's terrible wrath and Oedegaard's heartfelt belief in her seemed each in its own way too dreadful to be borne. The mother noticed no change, but Oedegaard saw at once that something was weighing on her and making her wretched. He gently asked her what was the matter, and when, instead of answering, she burst into tears, he thought they must be in want at home, and gave her a ten-dollar bill. Now that he, in spite of her sin against him, should give her money—and money, too, that she could openly give her mother, for it was money honestly got—made such a powerful impression on her, that she felt as if free from guilt again, and gave herself up to an ecstasy of joy. She took his hand with both hers, she thanked him, she laughed, she danced up and down, and rapturous delight beamed through her tears as she looked at him as a dog looks at its master when it is allowed to go out with him. He scarce knew her: she who generally sat lost in what he was saying, now was in the ascendant over him. For the first time he saw a strong, wild nature rise up before him; for the first time Life's fountain splashed forth its red stream over him, and he started back blood-hot. But she darted through the door and up the hill on her way home. She put down the money on the griddle in front of her mother, and threw her arms round her neck.

"Who gave you this money?" said the mother, all a-flame in a moment.

"Oedegaard, mother, Oedegaard! He is the finest man in the world!"

"What am I to do with it?"

"I don't know——O mother dear, if you knew——," and she threw her arms round her mother's neck again, for now she felt she could and she would tell her all.

But Gunlaug impatiently shook herself free.

"Would you have me take alms?" she cried. "Take his money back to him! If you've let him think that we were in want, you've cheated him!"

"But mother——"

"Take his money back to him on the spot I tell you, or else I'll go myself and throw it back at him,—at him, who's stolen my child from me!"

The mother's lips were trembling as she said these last words. Petra moved away, more and more pale, softly opened the door and slowly walked out of the house.

Before she well knew it, the ten-dollar bill was torn to atoms between her fingers; when she realized this, she broke forth into a torrent of angry indignation against her mother. But Oedegaard must know nothing of this!—yes, he should know all! There must be nothing kept back from him any more!

A moment later she was standing in his room telling him that her mother would not take the money, and that she, in her anger at having to come back with it, had torn the bill in pieces. She was going on to tell him the rest, but he looked at her coldly, and bade her go home again, recommending her at the same time to obey her mother, even when it was difficult for her. This sounded very strange to her, for she knew that he at any rate did not do what his father wanted him of all things to do. On her way home, her grief and passion burst forth again, and just at that moment she met Pedro Ohlsen. She had purposely kept out of his way all this time, for he was the cause of all her woes.

"Where have you been?" he asked, walking along by her side. "Is anything the matter with you?"

There was such a tempest in her heart that it might cast her where it would. Carried away by her feelings, she could not see why her mother should have forbidden her to have

anything to do with just this one person: it was only another whim of hers, of course, thought she.

"Shall I tell you what I've been doing?" he said, in an entreating tone, as she stopped. "I've bought you a sailing-boat; I thought you might like to sail,"—and he gave a laugh. His kindness, which had something in it of an humble appeal for friendship, was just the thing to touch her at that moment; she nodded; and he with busy, eager air, whispered to her to go out beyond the town into the lane to the right, until she got to the big yellow boat-house: he would come and fetch her from behind it, and no one would see it there. Off she went, and presently he came for her, all happiness and good-behaviour, and as if he were a big boy. They sailed about for a while in the light breeze; then they lay-to by an island, made the boat fast, and got out. He had all sorts of nice things with him, which he gave her with trembling joy; then taking out his flute, he began to play. For a while she forgot her sorrow as she watched his joy; and as the feeling of pity that comes of watching the happiness of the weak grew upon her, she began to take a liking to him.

After that day she had a new and constant secret to keep from her mother, so that before long she kept her mother from knowing about any of her doings. Gunlaug asked no questions; she trusted entirely, until she entirely mistrusted. But from that day Petra had a thing to keep ever secret from Oedegaard as well; for she took many a present from Pedro Ohlsen. Nor did Oedegaard ask anything, but he grew day by day more formal and distant with her at her studies. So Petra was now divided amongst three: she never spoke of any of them to the others, and she had some special secret to guard from each.

Meanwhile she was now grown up, though she herself did not yet know it. One day Oedegaard told her that it was time for her to be confirmed.

This information filled her with great unrest; for she knew that with confirmation her lessons would come to an end, and what was to happen then?

Her mother had a little attic built for her, for, after confirmation, Petra was to have a room of her own: the incessant hammering and nailing were painful reminders to her. Oedegaard noticed that she was growing more and more silent, and sometimes, too, he saw that she had been weeping. Religious instruction made great impression under these circumstances, though Oedegaard with tender care avoided everything that might touch her too deeply. It was for this reason that some fortnight before confirmation he closed his lesson with the simple remark that that was their last. He meant the last with *himself;* for he intended to look after her; but others, and not he, were to be her teachers. She, however, sat motionless in her chair; the blood left her cheeks; her eyes were never moved from his face. Touched by her emotion, he involuntarily sought to give his reason.

"Of course all girls are not grown up by confirmation time; but you feel, I'm sure, that you are."

If she had been standing in the full light of a great fire, she could not have been redder than she was at these words. Her bosom heaved, her eyes looked timidly about her and were full of tears, and Oedegaard, still more perplexed, hastily went on:

"Would you like to go on all the same, though?"

The moment he had said it, he saw what it was that he had proposed, and that it was a wrong thing to have done; he would have tried to withdraw it, but already she had raised her eyes to his, and though she did not say "Yes" with her lips, yet it could not have been said more clearly. To ease his own conscience by giving himself an excuse, he asked her:

"Isn't there anything in especial that you would like to

take up? Anything that—" and he bent towards her, "anything that you feel a call for, Petra?"

"No!" she answered, so sharply that he reddened, and, growing cooler, fell back into the meditations which for long years had filled his thoughts, and which now her unexpected answer had awakened again.

That there was something remarkable in the girl he had never doubted since the time when she was a child, and he had been used to seeing her march about singing at the head of the town's street boys. But the longer he taught her, the less he understood the natural bent of her talents and powers. There was evidence of them in every moment: whatever she happened to be thinking to be wanting, that her whole body and spirit pourtrayed, with all the fullness of her strength and the glory of her beauty. Yet in words—still more in writing—her thoughts were mere childishness. She seemed to be nothing but wayward imagination though, to be sure, Oedegaard put most of that down to restlessness. She was very diligent in her work, but always her object seemed to be to get through her lessons, rather than to learn anything, what was would be on the next page was what her thoughts were busy with. She had religious emotions, but, as the priest put it, "no turn for a religious life."

Oedegaard was often in perplexity as to her future. Once more he seemed to be at the starting-point, and his thoughts flew of their own accord to the stone steps where he had first taken her into his care; once more he seemed to hear the mother's sharp tones as she laid the responsibility on him, because he had named the Lord. He walked up and down the room several times, and then, pulling himself together, spoke.

"I am going abroad," he said, with a certain amount of hesitation; "I have asked my sisters to look after you meanwhile, and when I come back again we'll see what

more is to be done. Farewell! we shall see one another again before I go!"

He walked away so quickly into the next room that she did not have time even to take his hand.

When she saw him again it was where she least expected it, and that was in the pulpit just before her, as she stood up in the church among the flock of maidens for confirmation. This so excited her that her thoughts were far, far from the holy rite for which he had prepared her in humility and prayer.

Yes, but Oedegaard's old father's thoughts were straying too: he paused and gazed long at his son, as he stepped forth to begin.

Petra was destined to another surprise that morning; for somewhat lower down sat Pedro Ohlsen, in stiff, new clothes; he stretched out his head so as to be able to look over the heads of the boys at her among the flock of girls! He ducked down again at once; but she saw him again and again thrust up his head with its scant covering of hair, and bob down again. It distracted her thoughts; she tried not to see, but could not help looking; and just at the moment when all the others were deeply affected—many of them, indeed, in tears—Petra was shocked to see Pedro [illegible]ding up with his mouth and eyes wide open and motionless and his whole body apparently paralysed. He seemed to have no power either to sit down or go away, for opposite him stood Gunlaug, in all her majestic height. Petra shuddered to see her mother, for her face was white as the altar-cloth. Her black curly hair seemed to be rising up, her eyes to have a power to thrust him off, as if they were saying, "Away from her! what have *you* to do with her? At length he sank down on his seat beneath her gaze, and very soon afterwards sneaked out of the church.

Presently Petra began to grow calmer, and the longer she listened the more earnest she grew. And when now

she turned back from the altar, after giving her confirmation-promise, and looked through her tears at Oedegaard, who stood nearest to all her good resolves, she promised in her heart that she would never turn his trust to shame. He seemed to be praying for the same, as his steady eye shone upon her; but when she got back to her place and sought him out again, he was gone. She went home at once with her mother, who, on the way, let fall:

"Well, now *my* part with you's done; now let the Lord do His!"

When they had finished dinner—mother and daughter had dined alone together—Gunlaug said, as she rose:

"Well, now we'll go and see him—the parson's son, I mean. I don't know what's the good of what he's been doing, but anyway he's meant well. Put on your things again, child."

The road to the church, which those two had often walked together, lay above the town, and they had never before been seen together in the street through the town; indeed, the mother had scarcely been there since she had come back. Now she turned down into the street at once; she wanted to walk through the whole length of it—she with her grown-up daughter!

On the afternoon of Confirmation Sunday the folks in such a little town are all to be seen in the streets, either on their way from house to house with congratulations, or walking up and down just to see and be seen. At every step there is a pause and a greeting, a hand-shake and a kindly wish; the poorer children, clad in the half-worn garments of the richer ones, walk about to show themselves and their gratitude; the sailors of the place, dressed in outlandish finery and with hats a-slant, the town fops—the clerks—go about in troops, greeting and being greeted; the half-grown-up lads from the Latin school, each arm-in-arm with his best friend in the world, saunter about,

uttering their half-grown-up criticisms; but to-day all in their hearts must perforce feel themselves inferior to Yngve Vold, the lion of the town, the young merchant, the richest man in the place, who had just come back from Spain, all ready and able to take over his mother's huge fish business.

With a yellow hat over his yellow curls he flashed through the streets, and the young girls and lads just confirmed were well-nigh forgotten; for all turned to welcome him, and he talked with everyone, laughed at everyone. Up and down the street you could see his bright hair and hat, and hear his bright laugh. When Petra and her mother came out, he was the first they stumbled upon, and, as if they really had done so, he started back from Petra, whom he no longer knew.

She had grown tall; not so tall as her mother, but still taller than most women: she was graceful in her carriage, refined, and yet spirited-looking: her mother, and yet not her mother, in constant alternation. Even the young merchant, who walked along near them, could no longer draw the passer-by's eyes on himself now: these two, mother and daughter together, were a rarer sight. They walked briskly, greeting no one, for they were seldom addressed by any but seamen; and they quickened their pace as they walked back again down the street, for they heard that Oedegaard had just left home for the steamer, which was about to start.

Petra hurried most; she must, yes, she *must* bid him farewell and thank him before he went. O, it was too bad of him to go away from her like that! She looked at none of all the many that looked at her; it was the smoke from the steamer rising above the houses that she saw, and it seemed to her to be moving away. When they got to the quay the steamer was just putting off, and it was with a sob in her throat that she hastened off again

to the lanes leading to the beach, jumping along rather than walking, her mother striding after her. As it had taken the steamer some time to clear the harbour, she was early enough to be able to jump down on to the beach, spring up upon a rock, and wave her pocket-handkerchief vigorously. The mother stood back in the lane and would not go down. Petra waved higher and higher, but no one on the steamer waved back again.

Then she could hold out no longer, and, for weeping's sake, must needs go home by the road above the town. Her mother walked along with her in utter silence. The attic that Gunlaug had given her that day, and in which for the first time she had slept the night before, and dressed herself so joyously in her new clothes that morning, got her back that evening all in tears, and with no eyes for aught around her. She refused to go downstairs, where guests and seamen had assembled. She took off her confirmation-things and sat on the bed till night-fall; and it seemed to her that the dreariest thing in the whole world was to be grown up.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CHAIN OF GOLD.

SOON after confirmation, Petra went over to Oedegaard's sisters one day, but she perceived at once that it was an error on his part to send her there; for the priest went about his work so that she never saw him, and his daughters —both older than Hans—were cold and reserved. They contented themselves with giving her scant directions from their brother as to what she should do. She was to go and spend the whole morning in taking part in the housekeeping work of a house beyond the town, and the afternoon in the sewing-school; she was to sleep and have her morning and evening meal at her own home. She did as she was bid, and liked it well enough so long as it was new; but after a while, and especially when summer came on, she began to grow tired of it, for at that time of the year she had been in the habit of spending the whole day in the woods, reading her books, and with all her heart she longed for them again, as she longed for Oedegaard and as she longed for some one to talk to. The consequence was that she took such companionship as she could find. Now, it happened that about this time there came to the sewing-school a young girl named Lise Light—at least Lise, but not really Light, for Light was the name of a young cadet

who had been at home at Christmas-time, and had got engaged to her on the ice, when she was only a school-girl. Lise was ready to die if there was a word of truth in it, and shed tears if anyone mentioned it: meanwhile all the girls called her Lise Light. This emotional little Lise Light wept often and often laughed; but whether she was weeping or whether she was laughing, her thoughts were always running on love. The whole school was soon filled by a swarm of new and wonderful thoughts. If a hand was stretched out for the reel, the hand was the wooer, and the reel said "Yes," or "No." The needle was plighted to the thread, and the thread was offering itself up, stitch after stitch, for its cruel lover's sake. Did any girl prick herself, she was pouring forth her heart's blood; did any exchange her needle, she was fickle-hearted. If two girls were seen whispering together, it must be because there was some secret confidence between them; straightway two more began to whisper, and then another two; each had her own bosom friend, and there were a thousand mysteries in the air. Such a state of things could not last.

One afternoon, towards twilight, Petra was standing outside the house with a big handkerchief over her head, for there was a fine, drizzling sort of rain about. She was looking in the direction of a young seaman, who was standing in the alley whistling a valse; and though she was holding the handkerchief tight under her chin with both hands, so that only mouth and nose could be seen, the seaman, with glad quickness, discovered that she was looking for him, and quickly sprang to where she stood.

"I say, Gunnar," she said, "will you come for a walk?"

"Why, it's raining!"

"Pooh! that's nothing!" she answered; and they made their way to a cottage further up the hill.

"Buy me some cakes," said she; "those with cream on them, I mean."

"Why, you're always wanting cakes!"

"Those with cream, I say!" she repeated; and he presently came out again with them. She stretched out her hand from beneath her wrap, drew them in, and went along eating. When they had got right above the town, she handed him a bit of cake, and said:

"Listen, Gunnar! We two have always stuck to one another, haven't we? I have always liked you better than all the other boys. You believe that, don't you? It's true, I can tell you! And now that you're second mate, and will soon get to command a ship, you ought to get engaged, I think, Gunnar. But aren't you going to eat your cake?"

"No; I've begun to chew."

"Well, what do you say to what I said?"

"Oh, there's no hurry about that."

"No hurry! why, you're going to sail the day after to-morrow!"

"Yes; but I'm coming back again, I suppose, am I not?"

"Yes, of course; but it's very uncertain whether I shall have the opportunity then, for you don't know where I may be by that time."

"What! am I to be engaged to *you*, then?"

"Yes, of course, Gunnar; you ought to have seen that. But you're always so stupid at seeing things, and that's why you're only a sailor."

"Oh, I don't mind that; it's good enough to be a sailor."

"That's true, because your mother owns a ship. But what do you say now? You *are* such a slow coach!"

"Why, what *can* I say?"

"What *can* you say? Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps you won't have me?"

"Ah, Petra! you know well enough; indeed I will. But I don't believe I can rely on you."

"Oh, yes, Gunnar! I shall be true—so true—to you."

He stood silent for a moment, and then:

"Let me look at your face, Petra," he said.

"Why?"

"I want to see if you're really in earnest."

"Do you think I'm joking, Gunnar?" she asked, provoked; and she raised her kerchief.

"Well, Petra, if it's real, sober earnest, give me a kiss, so that I may know it's all right."

"Are you mad?" she cried, pulling the kerchief over her again, and walking fast away.

"Stop, Petra, stop! You don't understand. Now that we're sweethearts——"

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!"

"Well, I know what's the proper thing, don't I? I've seen far more of the world than you have. Just think of all that I've seen."

"Seen! why you've used your eyes like a numskull; and your talk's as silly as your sight."

"Well, then, what do *you* understand then by our being sweethearts, eh, Petra? I suppose I may ask that much? To run up hills after one another doesn't seem to me much like it."

"No, that's true enough," she laughed, as she checked her pace. "But listen, now, Gunnar; and whilst we stand here and get breath I'll explain to you how lovers should behave to one another. So long as you are in the town, you shall wait outside the sewing-school every evening, and go home with me to our door; and if ever I go to any other house, you must wait in the street for me till I come. And when you're abroad, you must write to me, and buy things and send them me. Ah, I forgot! we shall want a couple of rings, with your name in one and mine in the

other, with the year and the day of the month stamped on them, to give to one another; but, as I've got no money, you must buy them both."

"That I'll do willingly enough; but——"

"Well, what do you want now with your 'buts'?"

"Good Lord! I was only thinking that I must get the measure of your finger."

"That you shall, and at once," she said, as she plucked up a piece of grass, measured her finger with it, and handed it him, saying:

"Don't throw it away, now."

He wrapped it up in a piece of paper and put the paper in his pocket-book. She kept her eye on him till the pocket-book was safely put away again.

"Let's go back, now," she said; "I'm tired of staying out longer."

"Well, I must say, it seems to me it's rather mean of you, Petra——"

"Oh, very well, my good man; if you don't like it, I dare say I can manage all right without you!"

"Oh, of course, it's not that! But mustn't I even take your hand?"

"What for?"

"To make certain that we really are engaged now?"

"How silly! As if it could make it more certain, if we catch hold of each other's hands! Oh, well! you're quite welcome to, if you want to—there's my hand—no, I don't want it squeezed, thank you!" and she drew it back again beneath her wrap, and at the same time raised the kerchief with both hands, so that her whole face was once more visible, as she went on:

"If you tell anybody about this, Gunnar, I'll just say that it's all untrue; do you understand?" and she laughed, and began to go down the hill again.

Presently she stopped once more:

"To-morrow evening, sewing-class will be over at nine o'clock, so you can be waiting behind the house then."

"All right."

"Yes, but now go!"

"Won't you give me your hand to say good-bye?"

"I don't see what you keep wanting my hand for—no—you shan't have it now. Good-bye!" and she bounded off from him.

Next evening she contrived to be the last to leave the sewing-school, and the clock was on the stroke of ten as she came out of the house; but when she got into the garden, there was no Gunnar there. She had run over in her fancy all possible mischances, save that alone; she was so certain that he would come, that she waited just to be able to give it him well when he did. She was pleasantly enough entertained as she walked up and down the garden, for the Merchant's Glee Club in the house close by had just begun practising; the window was open, and a Spanish song so enchanted her as it fell upon the soft evening air, that she seemed to be herself in Spain and hearing its songs of praise sung from the high altar.

Spain was the land of her heart's desire. Every summer brought the black Spanish hulls to the harbour, and then songs of Spain echoed through the streets of the little town. On Oedegaard's wall there hung a series of beautiful pictures of Spain, and very likely even now he was there, and she—she was with him! But she was brought back to herself again; for there, behind the apple-tree, came Gunnar at last, hurrying along—no, not Gunnar! as she recognized, with a start—it was the young merchant who had come back from Spain, Yngve of the yellow hair and yellow hat.

"Ha, ha, ha!" rang out his lightsome laugh, "did you take me for someone else?"

"No!" she said, with angry abruptness, and dashed

away in affright; but he sped after her, chattering away without ceasing as he ran, talking very quickly all the while with the glib fluency that men used to speaking various tongues acquire.

"See, I can keep up with you; I run very fast—running away's no good—I *must* talk to you: this is the eighth evening I've been waiting here."

"The eighth evening!"

"Yes, the eighth evening! and I'd gladly wait another eight to meet you, wouldn't I? It's no good your running; I won't let you get off, and you're tired now, I can see."

"No, I'm not!"

"Yes, you are!"

"No, I'm not!"

"Yes, you are! Talk, if you're *not* tired then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he echoed. "Pooh, do you call that talking?" and they both came to a standstill.

Half in jest, half in earnest, they exchanged a few light words. He began to praise Spain, and one glowing description followed another, and he wound up with a curse for the little town at their feet. Petra's eyes lit up when he began to talk of Spain; it made her ears tingle to hear him: her gaze rested on the gold chain which he wore twice twisted round his neck.

"This chain," said he, suddenly, as he drew forth the end of it to which was fastened a gold cross, "this chain I brought to show the singing-club this evening; it comes from Spain; you shall hear its history," he continued. "When I was in the South of Spain, I once went to a shooting-meeting and won the prize. At the banquet in the evening it was handed to me with these words: 'Take it with you to the North, and, with all respectful reverence from the gentlemen of Spain, give it to the fairest maiden in your native town.' Then the trumpets sang forth, the flags

waved, the cavaliers applauded loudly, and I took the prize!"

"Oh, how beautiful!" burst forth from Petra's lips; for straightway there stood clear before her the Spanish festival with its bright Spanish colours and songs, and swarthy Spaniards, lit up by the rays of the sun as it set over the vine-clad hills, turning their thoughts to the fairest maiden in the land of snow and ice.

Yngve was a young man of good disposition, despite his marvellous forwardness and self-conceit, and he went on telling her of these things. One story after another increased her longing for that wondrous land, and now, transported there in fancy, she began to hum the Spanish song that she had heard a short while before, and gradually to keep time to it with her feet.

"What!" he cried, "can you dance the Spanish dance?"

"Yes," she sang, her feet following the music, and with her fingers imitating castanets, as she had seen the Spanish sailors do.

"*You* deserve the Spaniard's gift!" he burst out, as if the thought had suddenly struck him; "you are the fairest maiden I have met with!"—and he had taken the gold chain from his neck and twined it dexterously and many times round hers, before she well knew what he was about.

But *when* she realized what he had done, the deep flush, peculiar to herself, swept over her face, and the tears seemed about to gush forth from her eyes, so that Yngve, who had gone from one stage of wonder to another, was now stricken by a feeling of deep shame at what he had done, and knew not what more he would have; his one feeling was that he had better go—so he went.

At midnight she was still standing by the open window of her attic, the chain in her hand. Gently lay

the night of mid-summer over town and fjord and distant hill; from the street came once again the sound of the Spanish song, for the glee club had gone home with Yngve Vold. Two voices only were singing the words, and the rest were imitating with their mouths the accompaniment of a guitar. Their song was of a beautiful garland, and she heard distinct and clear every word of it:

"Take this wreath and think of me,
Take this wreath—'tis fit for thee:
Greenest leaves and blossoms brightest
For the lass of lassies fairest;
Blushing roses, lilies whitest,
For the maiden purest, rarest.
Take this garland, fit for thee,
Take it—and forget not me."

When she opened her eyes next morning, it seemed to her she had been in a wood where the sun shone upon every part of it, and all the trees were golden laburnums, from which hung long, shining clusters of blossom that nearly touched her as she made her way through. Straightway her thoughts flew to the chain: she seized it and flung it on over her nightdress; then she put a black handkerchief over the white linen, and put the chain on over that, for it looked better against the black. Still sitting on her bed, she looked at herself in the little hand-mirror, and wondered if she really were so pretty. She got up to do her hair. Suddenly she remembered that her mother as yet knew nothing about it: she must be quick and go down and tell her all. Just as she had finished dressing and was about to twine the chain round her neck, it occurred to her to wonder what her mother would say, what everybody would say, and what she should answer when they asked her why she wore that costly chain. The question was a very reasonable one, and seemed to her more and more difficult to answer every moment. At length she drew

forth a little box, laid the chain in it, thrust the box into her pocket, and, for the first time in her life, felt what it was to be poor.

She did not go to her proper work that morning, but she sat up above the town, near the place where the chain had been given her, holding it in her hand and feeling as if she had stolen it.

That evening she waited behind the garden for Yngve Vold even longer than she had waited for Gunnar the night before. she meant to give him back the chain. But, as it happened, Gunnar's ship had unexpectedly set sail the previous day, because there was a large amount of freight for it in the next port, and Yngve Vold, who owned it, had had to set off about the same business. He had plenty to do there besides, and so it was three weeks before he returned.

During these three weeks the chain had moved first from her pocket to the chest of drawers, thence into an envelope, and the envelope had been put into a secret place, while she had been moving from one humiliating discovery to another. Now for the first time she was fully aware of the distance which separated her from the ladies of the town: any of them might have worn the chain without anybody's asking why or wherefore. But Yngve Vold would not have dared to offer it to any of them, without offering his hand along with it: he only dared do such a thing to the Fisher Lassie. If he had wanted to give her something, why did he not give her something she could use? But he had only wanted to shame her the more deeply by giving her something which she could not by any possibility make use of. As for his tale about "the fairest maid," that was most likely all make-up; for if the chain had been awarded to her on those grounds, he would not have come in secresy and by night. Anger and shame tortured her the more, because she no longer had anyone

in whom she could confide. It was no wonder, then, that the first time she met the cause of all her angry and humiliating thoughts again she reddened, so that he could not, she felt, help misconstruing her blush; and the thought of that made her blush the deeper. She tore home again, pulled out the chain, and, darting out above the town, sat down to wait for him, though as yet it was broad daylight. Now he should have it back, at any rate! She felt quite certain he would come, for, in spite of his absence, he had blushed at the sight of her. But presently this very thought began to tell in his favour: he would not have changed colour so if she had been nothing to him. He would have come before if he had been at home. Twilight was deepening, for the days had fast been growing shorter during the last three weeks. But with the darkness, a change often comes over our resolution. She sat among the trees just above the road, and could see without being seen. She sat thus a little time, but he did not come, and it filled her heart with contending passions. She listened in anger at one moment, in terror the next: she heard the step of the passers-by long before she saw them; but it was never he. The birds, as they moved dreamily from one perch among the leaves overhead to another, were enough to frighten her, in her excited state of mind: every sound from the town below, every cry, startled her.

On board a great ship in the haven the sailors were heaving the anchor, singing as they worked, for it was to be towed out that night, to start off with the best of the early morning breeze. Oh how she longed to be going with it on the mighty deep! The sailors' parting song seemed her own, the clang of the bars in the capstan seemed to give her strength to rise—what for? where to? See, there in the road, straight in front of her, was the yellow hat. She sprang up, and, without further thought, started off running, and, as she did so, remembered that this was just the

thing she ought not to have done: it was adding error to error; so she suddenly stopped. When he got up to where she was standing among the trees, her breathing was so long and deep that he could hear each separate breath, and her fear now had the same power over him as before her fearlessness had had. He looked at her in embarrassment—almost in bewilderment—as he said, in a low tone:

"Don't be frightened."

But she was trembling, as he could see. Thinking to give her confidence, he tried to take hold of her hand; but she, at the first touch, sprang up all on fire, and dashed away again, leaving him standing there.

She did not run far, for her breath was exhausted: her temples were throbbing and burning; her breast seemed as if it would burst; she pressed her hands against it, and listened. She heard a step in the grass, a rustle in the leaves: he was coming straight towards her. Did he see her? No, he did not! Yes, he saw her! No, he was going past! It was not fear that reigned in her heart; but her excitement and agitation was such that when she felt herself safe from him, her strength left her, and she sank down, senseless and powerless.

After a long time she rose and walked slowly down the hill, sometimes pausing, sometimes moving on again, as if she had no object in her motions. When she got down to the road again, he was sitting there, patiently waiting for her. He got up, but she did not see him, for she was walking as if in a dream. She uttered no word, she made no gesture: she only laid her hands before her eyes and wept. This so completely overwhelmed Yngve Vold that his tongue—at other times so busy—came to a standstill. When at length he spoke, it was with a peculiar air of determination.

"This evening," he said, "I shall speak to my mother;

to-morrow all shall be arranged, and in a few days you shall go abroad to be my wife."

He expected her to answer, or, at any rate, to look up; but she did neither. He interpreted this in his own fashion.

"You don't answer? You cannot, I suppose. Very well, just rely on me; for from this moment you're mine! Good night." And with these words he left her.

She walked home as if mist-clouds were thick about her; a slight feeling of dread glided in among them and tried to divide them, but the clouds rolled back upon her again.

All the power that Yngve Vold had had over her thoughts during the past three weeks had served to prepare a way for her mind to take possession of this new wonder and this new field for her fancy to inhabit. He was the richest man and of the best family in the town, and he wanted to lift her up to him above all cavil. This was a thing so unexpectedly different from the thoughts she had been nourishing of late in her anger and passion, that it alone was enough to make her feel happy. And she grew happier and happier as she more fully took in her new and utterly overpowering position. She saw herself now inferior to none, and near the attainment of all her vague wishes. First and foremost she saw Yngve Vold's largest ship, all decked out with flags for their wedding day, receiving them on board, and, after firing off minute-guns and sending up rockets, bearing them away to Spain, where shines the bridal sun.

When she woke next day, the maid came in and told her that it was half-past eleven! Petra felt ravenously hungry and asked for food, which was brought her; she sent for more and ate it: her head was aching and her limbs were weary: she sank back to sleep again. When she woke, about three o'clock in the afternoon, she felt all right again: her mother came up and said that no doubt she had slept her sickness off, she herself often did so; but

now (she added) it was time for her to get up and go to her sewing-class. Petra sat up in bed and leant her head on her arms; she answered, without looking up, that she should never go to the sewing-school again. Her mother thought that she was still a bit dazed from her long sleep, and went down to get a parcel and a letter which a ship's-boy had brought. What! was he sending her presents already?

Petra had lain down again, but she jumped up in a moment, and with a sort of solemnity in her manner, opened the parcel as soon as she was alone—it contained a pair of French shoes. Somewhat disappointed, she was about to put it down, when she felt something heavy in the toes. She put in her hand, and drew out of one of the toes a little tissue-paper parcel—it contained a gold bracelet; in the other there was also a little parcel, carefully wrapped up—it held a pair of French gloves, and from the right-hand glove she drew forth yet another wrapper, in which were folded two gold rings. "Already!" thought Petra, and her heart beat as she looked at the inscription; and there, sure enough, she saw in the one, "Petra," followed by the year and the day of the month; and in the other, "Gunnar." She turned pale; she flung the rings and the whole package on the floor as if it had burnt her fingers, and tore open the letter. It was dated from Calais, and read as follows:

"Dear Petra,

"Just arrived here, after having had good winds from latitude 61 to latitude 54, and later on a toughish storm until we got here, which was hard work for better ships than ours to make way against, though ours is a good ship for going. You must know that all the way here I've been thinking of you, and of what happened between us last time; I'm so angry at not having been

able to say 'good-bye' to you properly, that I went on board in a very bad temper, but you've never been out of my mind for a moment, except now and again between whiles, for a sailor has a hard time of it, you know. But now that we've got here, I've spent all my wages in presents for you, as you asked me to, and the money I got from mother I spent too, so that now I have none. But if I can get leave, I'll be with you almost as soon as the presents; for so long as it's secret between us, I can't feel certain about other people, especially young men, of whom there are so many about; but I want it known for certain, so that no one will have any excuse, and will know that he's got to beware of me. You can easily get a better fellow than me, for you can have anyone you like; but you'll never find a more faithful one than I am. Now I will stop, because I have used up two sheets of paper, and the letters are getting so big, for this is the hardest thing I have had to do for you, but I'll go on doing it all the same, because you want me to. And now I end by saying that you were quite in earnest, I'm sure; for if you weren't it would be a great sin, and might bring unhappiness to many.

"GUNNAR ASK,

"Second mate of the brig

"'The Norwegian Constitution.'"

A great fear fell upon Petra, and in a moment she was out of bed and dressed. She must get out, and advice must be found somewhere for her; for everything now had become confused, uncertain, and perilous. The more she thought over things, the greater the tangle seemed; she must get help from someone, else she would never unravel herself from it. But who was there whom she could trust? No one, surely, except her mother. When, after a long struggle with herself, she was standing by her in

the kitchen, trembling and tearful, but strong in her resolve to trust her fully, and get in return her full help, the mother said, without looking up, and therefore without noticing Petra's face:

"Well, he's come home again! he's just been here."

"Who?" murmured Petra, and clutched for support: if Gunnar were back already, all hope was gone. She knew Gunnar; he was slow and good-tempered, but once roused to anger, he was mad in his wrath.

"You are to go up there at once, he said," continued the mother.

"Up there?" she repeated, trembling. She saw at once that he had told her mother all about their engagement; but what was to happen now?

"Yes, to the parsonage," added Gunlaug.

"To the parsonage? Mother, is it Oedegaard who's come home, then?"

"Who else should it be?" said the mother, turning to look at her.

"Oedegaard!" shouted Petra, rapturously; and the storm of joy that swept over her purified all the air round her in a moment "Oedegaard is come! O, God in Heaven, Oedegaard is come!" and she was out of the door and over the fields, dancing, laughing, and crying out at the top of her voice. It was he—he—he whom she longed for; had he been at home, nothing would ever have happened! With him she was safe. The mere thought of his noble, shining face, his gentle voice, nay, even the quiet rooms, with their many pictures, in which he dwelt, made her feel more peaceful and secure again.

She took time to compose herself, and looked round at the town and country round glowing in the sunset of autumn, and at the rich radiance that lay over the fjord; in the strait beyond, the curling smoke of the steamer that had brought Oedegaard was just dying away. Oh, merely

to know that he was at home made her happy, well, and strong again! She prayed God to help her in keeping Oedegaard from ever leaving her again. And just as she was exalted by the mere hope of this, she saw him coming smiling towards her: he had known which way she would take, and had come to meet her! This touched her, and bounding up to him, she seized both his hands and kissed them; this gave him a feeling of shame, and as he saw some one afar off, he drew her off the road and back among the trees, holding her hands in his while she kept on repeating:

"How glorious it is that you've come! Oh, I can hardly believe that it's you! Oh, you must never, never go away again! Don't leave, Oh, don't leave me!"

Her tears began to flow, and he gently pressed her head against his shoulder to hide them; he wanted to calm her, for he needed her to be quiet. But she laid her head there, as a bird nestles beneath the wing that is raised for it, and she seemed as if she would like never to leave it.

Overcome by her trust in him, he put his arm round her, as if to assure her of the protection she sought; but no sooner was she aware of this than she lifted her tearful face to his, her eye met his, and all that can be expressed in a look, when repentance meets love, when gratitude meets the giver's joy, and when yes meets yes, came close upon one another. He drew her head to him and pressed his lips against hers: he had early lost his mother, and this was the first time in his life that he kissed one of the other sex; it was the same with her. Neither of them could tear themselves away from the other, and when they did so, it was only to sink together again. He was trembling with excitement, but her face beamed with blushing joy, as she threw her arms round his neck and hung upon him like a child.

And when they sat down and she could touch with her

hands his hair, his breast-pin, his neck-cloth, and all that she had before looked at from a respectful distance; and when he bade her say *du*[1] and not *De*, and she could not; and when he tried to tell her how rich she had made his poor life from the moment of their first meeting, and how long he had struggled against his love so that it might not check her development, and so that he might not repay himself for his pains thus; and when he discovered that she was not in a state to take in or understand a word of what he was saying; and when he himself began to see little sense in it; and when she wanted to go home with him at once, and he had laughingly to ask her to wait a few days' time, so that they might travel away from the town together;—then they felt, then they said, as they sat there among the trees, with fjord and mountain lying before them deep in the evening sun, that this indeed was happiness. And afar off in the wood sounded the notes of a horn, and the words of a song, telling them it was so.

"Ah, sweet is Love's first meeting
As song amid the trees,
Or in the sunset fleeting,
Borne o'er the red'ning seas,
The sound of Nature's voices,
Whose mystic tones of love
Make for a span the soul of man
Even as souls above."

[1] In Norse, *du* (the second pers. sing.) is familiar and loving; while *De* (third plur.) is more formal and distant.

## CHAPTER V.

### PETRA'S LOVERS MEET.

NEXT morning Petra sat half-dressed in her room, and the whole day long she could get no further. Every time she made a new attempt, her arms sank back into her lap. Like the hare-bells in the fields, like the ear laden with grain, her thoughts bowed beneath their own weight. Peace, trustfulness, and all beauteous visions hovered above the airy castle wherein her soul dwelt. She went over all yesterday's meeting again and again,—each word, each look, each pressure of the hand, each lover's kiss; she tried to go through it all, from their meeting to their parting, but it was in vain; for each separate thought led her into bright visions of the future, visions full of the promise of happiness. Sweet as these were, she must put them away from her, so as to try to call to mind where she broke off; but as soon as she had done so, she plunged again into new wondrous dreams.

As she did not come down, her mother thought that she must have begun her lessons again, now that Oedegaard was back: her meals were sent up to her, and she was to be left in peace the whole day. Not till evening was coming on did she rise and make herself ready; for now she was to go and meet her love. She put on her confir-

mation dress,—the best she had; it was not much to look at, but she had never perceived that before. She had had little taste in dress till now, but to-day it came upon her: one thing, she felt, did not match another properly, and when she had got them right, it still seemed to her not at all pretty. To-day she would have given anything to have really been "the fairest"; and as the words came into her mind, she put out her hands to thrust them off; nothing, nothing should approach her to-day to trouble her peace. She walked quietly about, gently putting one thing and another in its place about the room, for the time was not yet come. She opened the window and looked out; red, warm clouds lay encamped athwart the mountains; but the cool air flowed in with tidings from the woods hard-by. "I am coming, I am coming!" it breathed, and she turned and went to the mirror to greet the bride there.

Just then she heard Oedegaard's voice talking to her mother below; she heard him being told where her room was: he was coming to fetch her! A strange wild feeling of joy thrilled through her, as she turned to see that everything was fit for him, and moved towards the door.

There came a gentle knock: "Come in," she answered softly, and stepped back a pace or two.

* * * * * * *

When Oedegaard had rung for his coffee that morning he was told that Yngve Vold, the merchant, had already called twice to see him. It jarred upon him to let a stranger enter upon his thoughts just on that day, but he felt that one who sought him so early must certainly have important business; moreover, he was scarcely dressed before Yngve Vold came again.

"Good morning," he said. "You're surprised, of course, at my being here? Well, so am I myself."

Oedegaard returned his salutation, and Yngve laid down his hat.

"You lie a-bed late," he went on; "I have been here twice before. I have something on my mind that I *must* talk with you about."

"Won't you take a seat?" said the other, seating himself in an arm-chair.

"Thanks, thanks; I prefer to walk about: I am too excited to keep still. Since the day before yesterday I've been mad, clean mad, I believe, neither more nor less; and the fault is yours,—yours!"

"Mine!"

"Yes, yours. Nobody had thought of the wench till you got hold of her; nobody took any notice of her till you brought her out. But now, any way, I've never seen anything like her, anything to come up to her, I tell you! In all Europe, I've never seen such a cursed marvellous little curly-haired creature—have you? I couldn't rest for her; I must have been bewitched; she was everywhere and always before my eyes. I took a voyage,—I came back again,—it was all no good, I tell you. I didn't even know who she was at first—"Fisher Lassie," they call her—gipsy, they ought to say, Spanish gipsy, witch—with her eyes, her breast, her hair all a-glow—what's that you're saying? She springs and dances about, flashing, laughing, sparkling, singing—a little devil, a veritable little devil. I ran after her one quiet night, you see, up among the trees in the wood yonder. She stopped, I stopped—a few words, a song, a dance—and then? Why then I gave her the chain I had with me; as true as I stand here, I'd had no thought of doing so the moment before! Next time, at the same spot, the same chase for her; she was frightened,—I—will you believe it?—I couldn't speak a single word, daredn't even touch her; and when she came again—can you believe me?—I offered to marry her, though the second before I'd never thought of such a thing! Yesterday I made up my mind to try myself and keep away

from her, but upon my heart and soul, I must be mad, stark mad; I *cannot* do it; I must be with her; if I don't get her I'll shoot myself, honour bright I will, and that's the whole story. What do I care for my mother,—devil take her!—or for this little town, this wretched little hole of a place. She shall get away from here, do you see, right away and far above this town; she shall be *comme il faut*, go abroad to France, to Paris; I'll pay for the journey, and you make all the arrangements. I might go with her, it's true, settle abroad, and not stop in this wretched little hole any longer; but then, you see, there's the fish! I want to make something out of this place; they're all asleep here; nobody thinks of anything, nobody speculates! Ah! the fish, the fish! nobody here looks after it properly; in Spain and abroad they're always making complaints about it. They need new methods of drying and packing, everything must be altered; the town must wake up, the trade go ahead, and the fish bring in millions, millions! Where did I leave off though? The fish, the Fisher Lassie; O well, they go well together: fish, Fisher Lassie—ha, ha!—well then, as I say, I find the money, you make the arrangements; she becomes my wife, and then——"

He got no further. He had not, while he had been talking, taken any notice of Oedegaard, who now had risen to his feet, pale as a corpse, and fell upon him with a slender Spanish cane in his hand. The other's amazement was beyond description.

"Be careful," he cried, as he warded off the first few strokes, "you may hit me!"

"Yes, I *may* hit you;—Spanish merchant, Spanish cane, they go well together,—ha, ha!" And the blows rained down over his shoulders, arms, hands, face, and wherever he could hit him. The other dashed about the room wildly.

"Are you mad?" he yelled; "are you out of your senses? I want to *marry* her, do you hear?—to marry her, I say!"

"Go!" roared Oedegaard, whose strength was now exhausted. And away from the madman dashed his fair-haired visitor, through the door and down the stairs, just stopping for a moment in the street to call out for his hat: it was thrown down to him through the window, and then all was peace once more.

* * * * * * *

"Come in!" said Petra that evening, in answer to the soft knock, as she herself drew back a pace or two the better to look at her love as he entered. Like a stream of ice-cold water dashed over her, like the solid earth rent beneath her feet, was the sight of that face that met her in the doorway! She staggered backwards and grasped at the bed-post, but in thought she fell from precipice to precipice. In less than a second, she who was but now the happiest of brides had fallen to be the worst of sinners. His face proclaimed, as if with a voice of thunder—not through all time and eternity could he ever forgive her.

"I see it," he whispered in a scarcely audible tone, "I see it; you are guilty!"

He leaned against the door-post and caught hold of the handle, as if he could not stand without it. His voice shook, and tears were rolling down his cheeks, but save for that, he was calm.

"Do you know what you have done?" he said—and his eyes seemed to pierce her to the earth. She made no answer—she did not even weep; she was stricken by utter, hopeless powerlessness. "Once before I gave my soul away," he went on, "and he to whom I gave it was killed by my fault. I could not recover from that sorrow, unless some one should be allowed to reach out and give me back my soul, healed once more. That you have done—and done it by treachery."

He paused, and vainly made two attempts to go on again; and then with a sudden rush of feeling he cried:

"And could you go and cast aside, as if it were a thing of clay, all that I have been building, thought upon thought, day after day, in these long years! Child, child, could you not see that I was building my life up in yours? Well—all that's over now!" And he made another effort to control his agony.

"No," he began again; "you're too young to understand; you don't know what you've done. But that you've *deceived* me, *that* you must know. Tell me, what have I done to you that you could be so cruel to me? Child, child, if you had only told me, even yesterday! Why, why have you deceived me so terribly?"

She heard what he said, and it was all true. He had staggered to a chair that stood by the window, and was leaning his head on the table beside it. He rose up, half sobbing with pain, then sat down again motionless.

"And I—and I who am not fit to help my old father," he moaned to himself; "I *can* not, I do not, feel the call for that work. Therefore no one may help me, and all my life must be a wreck."

He could say no more. His head sank upon his right hand, his left hung limp beside him; he looked as if he were not able to move; and thus he sat there, saying no word. Then he felt something warm against his hand, as it hung down; he gave a sudden start—it was Petra's breath. She was there on her knees beside him, her head bowed and her hands folded, looking at him in speechless prayer for mercy. He looked down at her in turn, and the eyes of neither moved. Then he raised his hands as if to keep her off; as if, as she looked at him, he heard a persuasive voice in his heart to which he must not listen. Quickly, hastily, he bent down to pick up his hat, which had fallen on the ground, and hurried to the door. But quicker even than he, she cast herself down in the way,

clasped his knees with her hands, and fixed her eyes on his, not saying a word the while; but as he stood there, he felt she was struggling for life. Then his old love overmastered him; once more he looked at her with eyes full of love and of agony, and clasped her head with both his hands. But there was a singing and moaning in his heart as when an organ has just ceased to play: there is air still within, but no melody. He withdrew his hands, and in such a way that she could not help feeling what was in his mind. Alas! it was only too evident.

"No, no!" he cried; "you can give yourself up to emotion; you cannot love!" He was overcome for a moment; and then: "Unhappy child, I may no longer watch over your future. God forgive you for having made mine desolate!"

He went past her, but she did not stir: he opened the door and shut it after him, she did not speak. She heard him on the stairs, she heard his last footstep on the flagstones and down in the street; then she uttered one cry, one single cry, and her senses left her: but at her cry her mother hastened up.

When Petra came to herself again she was lying in her bed, undressed and comfortably tucked in, and her mother sitting opposite her, with her head in both hands, and her fiery eyes fixed on her daughter.

"Have you finished your reading with him now?" she asked. "Have you now learned something, eh? And what is it that's to become of you *now?*"

The other's only answer was to burst out weeping. Long, long sat the mother there listening to her sobs, and then, with her own terrible earnestness, came the words: "Lord God, curse him body and soul!"

Up started Petra wildly. "Mother, mother!" she cried, "not him, not him! but me, me!"

"O, I know these men! I know what it is!"

"O, mother, he has been deceived, and by me; it is I who deceived him!"

She quickly told her mother everything, sobbing bitterly the whole time; she would not have *him* suspected, even for a moment. She told her all about Gunnar, and what she had asked of him, not rightly knowing what she was doing; and then of Yngve Vold's luckless gold chain, and how it had entangled her; and then of Oedegaard, and of how everything else went out of her mind when she saw him. She did not know how it had all come about, but she felt she had done great wrong to all of them, especially to him who had taken her and given her all that one mortal can give another.

The mother sat in silence for a long time, and then she said: "And have you done *me* no wrong? Where was *I* all this time that you never told me a word about it?"

"O, mother, mother, help me! Don't be hard on me; I feel that I shall have to suffer for this as long as I live, so I will pray to God to let me die soon! Dear, good God," she began straightway, and she folded her hands towards Him—"Dear, good God, listen to my prayer. I have utterly ruined my life; there is nothing more for me now. I am not fit to live; I don't understand life; let me die, then, O dear God!"

There was such a grim intensity in her prayer, that Gunlaug, who had harsh words ready for her, swallowed them down, and laid her hand on her daughter's arm to stop her from praying thus.

"Control yourself, child; don't tempt the Lord. You must live, even though life's bitter."

She got up, and never set foot in Petra's attic again.

Oedegaard had fallen sick, and was in a perilous state. His old father moved upstairs to him, and made his workroom by his side; to all who begged him to spare himself he made answer that it was his work to watch over his son

whenever that son lost any of those whom he loved more dearly than his father.

Such being the state of things, Gunnar suddenly came home!

He almost frightened his mother's life out of her by appearing so long before the ship he went out with; she thought it was his double, and his acquaintances were not much wiser than she. To all their wondering questions he returned no reasonable answer; but the matter soon became clearer to them, for the very day he came back he was driven out of Gunlaug's inn, and that by Gunlaug herself. From the steps she cried out to him, in a voice that echoed down Hollow Street:

"Don't you come here again; we've had quite enough of *your* sort!"

Before he had gone far, a girl came after him with a packet. The girl had another one besides; she gave him the wrong one, and Gunnar found in it a massive gold chain: he stood weighing it in his hands and staring at it. To begin with, he had not understood the reason of Gunlaug's mad wrath, but still less did he see why she should have sent him a gold chain. He shouted to the girl to come back. She must have made a mistake, she said, and she gave him the other packet, asking if that was his. It turned out to contain his presents to Petra. Yes, that was his, right enough; but whom was the gold chain for? That was for Merchant Vold, the girl answered, and went her way. Gunnar stood still, and gave himself up to thought. "Merchant Vold! does he give her presents? It must be he, then, who has stolen her from me—Yngve Vold—Oh, its you, is it? Very well, then——" His excitement and anger needed some vent; he must have something to knock to pieces. "Very well, then, Yngve Vold!"

For the second time that day the luckless merchant was

attacked unawares, and this time on his own doorstep. He tore away from the madman into his office, with Gunnar after him. All the clerks fell upon the riotous intruder, who hit away and lashed out in all directions. Chairs, desks, and tables were overturned; letters, dockets, and invoices flew about like smoke. At length auxiliaries came from Yngve's wharf, and, after a mighty struggle, Gunnar was thrown out into the street. But now the thing began to grow really serious. There happened to be two ships lying at the quay—one a foreigner, the other a Norseman; and as it was just dinner-time the sailors were all free to join in the fun. They joined battle at once, crew against crew, foreigners against natives; other crews were sent for, and came dashing up at full speed; the labourers, the old women, and the boys lent their aid, and at last there was nobody who knew either why or with whom he was fighting. It was no good for the skippers to come and swear at the men; it was no good for the respectable citizens to give their orders for the town's only policeman to be fetched—he happened to be out on the fjord fishing. They ran to the mayor, who was also postmaster, but he was shut up with the post-bag that had just arrived, and answered through the window that he could not come, his post-clerk was at a funeral, so they must wait. But as they would not stop killing one another till the letters were sorted, many people —especially old women—shouted out that Arne the smith ought to be fetched. This met with the respectable citizens' approval, and Arne's wife went to get him, "for the policeman was not at home," she said.

He came, much to the joy of the school-boys. Striking a few blows among the crowd, he got hold of one rash Spaniard, and used him as a club to belabour the others with at random.

When all was over, the mayor came along, walking with a stick. He found some old women and children talking

together on the field of battle. He bade them, with severity, go home to their dinners, and straightway did the same himself.

But the day after he held an inquiry, which occupied some time, as no one seemed to have the least idea as to who had been engaged in the fight: only all were agreed that Arne the smith had been in the thick of it, for they had seen him striking others with a Spaniard. For this Arne had to pay a fine of a dollar, and his wife, who had led him into it, got a beating from him on the eleventh Sunday after Trinity, as she had good cause to remember. These were the only judicial results of the fray. But other results there were. The little town was no longer a quiet little town: the "Fisher Lassie" had turned it topsy-turvy. The strangest stories were about, arising from a feeling of jealous anger against her for having been able to attract to her the cleverest man in the town and the two richest bachelors, to say nothing of "several" besides; for Gunnar gradually grew to be "several young men." Soon there was a universal storm of moral indignation. The disgrace of being the cause of a great street riot, and of having brought sorrow into three of the best families of the town, hung over the head of a young girl who had only been confirmed some six months before: three sweethearts at a time, and one of them her teacher, her benefactor! nay, indignation at this could not be held in. Had she not been the plague of the town even in her childhood? had they not, despite that, shown her by their gifts what they hoped of her, when Oedegaard took her up? and had she not now put them all to shame, crushed Oedegaard's life, and, following the bent of her nature, thrown herself, without restraint, into courses that must make her an outcast from society, and hand her over in old age to the House of Correction? Her mother must have been her accomplice, and the child must have learned her wicked ways in the

Seaman's Inn. The yoke that Gunlaug had laid upon the town must no longer be tolerated: neither she nor her daughter could be suffered to remain any longer amongst them: let everyone unite to drive them away.

That evening a crowd, made up of seamen who owed Gunlaug money; of tippling workmen, for whom she would not get work; and of youths, to whom she refused to give credit, led on by people of the better sort, assembled on the hill. They whistled, they hooted; they yelled out for the "Fisher Lassie" and for "Fish-Gunlaug." Presently a stone was hurled at the door, and then another through the attic window. Not till midnight did the noise die away. Behind the windows all had remained dark and noiseless.

Next day not a single person came to the inn, not so much as a child went by the house on the hill. But in the evening there was the same riotous mob as before, save that now all joined in, without distinction. The flowers were trampled down, the windows all broken in, the garden hedge torn up, and the young fruit-trees rooted out. Then they began to sing:

"'Mother, I've hooked a sailor fine.'
'Well done, my lass!'
'Mother, I've made a merchant mine.'
'Well done, my lass!'
'Mother, a parson's on my line.'
'Then pull in, my lass!
Men come and go,
And we older grow;
And what's the good if the big fish bite
When you can't pull 'em into your boat so tight?'

"'Mother, he's gone, that sailor fine.'
'Has he, my lass?'
'Mother, he's gone, that merchant mine.'
'Has he, my lass?'
'And the parson'll soon be off my line.'
'Then pull in, my lass!

**For men come and go,**
**And we older grow;**
**And what's the good if the big fish bite**
**When you can't pull 'em into your boat so tight?'"**

Then the crowd began to yell loudly for Gunlaug, for they wanted to hear her burst forth in her matchless wrath.

But Gunlaug, though she heard every word, sat silent within the house; for, for one's child's sake, a woman must be able to bear much.

## CHAPTER VI.

### PETRA'S FLIGHT.

PETRA was in her room on the first evening when the whistling, shouting, and hooting began. She sprung up, as if the house were on fire around her, or were falling to pieces above her head; she dashed about her room as if beaten by burning rods; there was a singing and burning in her breast; her thoughts were straining for an outlet, but down to her mother she dared not go, and before her only window stood the mob! A stone came flying through it, and fell on her bed; she gave a scream, and flew into one corner and hid behind a curtain among her old clothes. There she sat, crouched up, burning with shame, trembling with fear. Visions of unknown terrors floated in upon her: the air was filled with faces—gaping, grinning faces—that came close up to her own, while all around rained fire;—oho! not fire, but eyes; it was raining, pouring down eyes,—great glowing eyes, small twinkling eyes, eyes that stood still, eyes that ran to and fro. "O, Lord Jesus, help, help!"

Ah! what a relief it was when the last shout died away in the night, and all was black and still once more. She stole forth and threw herself on her bed, hiding her face in the pillows; but she could not hide herself from her thoughts. First and foremost in them stood the figure of her mother,

mighty and threatening as the thunder-clouds that gather round the mountains. Ah! what must not the mother be suffering for her sake! On her eyes fell not a wink of sleep, on her soul no peace; and day came, and brought no balm. She got up and walked to and fro, round and round, her only thought how she could make her escape; but she dared not meet her mother, and she dared not go out so long as it was daylight, and with the evening *they* would come again! But wait she must; for before midnight it was still more perilous to attempt to fly. And where was she to fly to? She had no money; she knew of no place to go to; but surely, she thought, there must be merciful, kindly folk somewhere, just as there was a merciful, kind God. *He* knew that however much she might have erred, it was not deliberately; He knew her remorse, and He too knew her helplessness. She listened for her mother's movements down below, but she heard none; she trembled at the thought of hearing her foot-step on the stairs, but she did not come. The girl who came to work there had doubtless fled, for no one brought Petra anything to eat. The broken window-pane let the cold air in in the morning, and now that evening was coming on it was still worse. She had made up a small bundle of her clothes and dressed herself completely, so as to be ready. But she must wait for the raging mob again, and bear whatever they might do.

There they were again! Whistling, hooting, throwing stones—worse, far worse, than last night! She crept into her corner, folded her hands, and never ceased to pray. If only her mother would not go out to them! If only they would not break in! Then they began to sing a coarse libellous ditty, and though every word cut her like a knife, yet she must sit and listen to it; but when she heard her mother's name mixed up with it, and knew that they had had the shameful injustice to make out Gunlaug guilty as herself, she sprang up and dashed forward, determined to

speak to the cowardly crew or throw herself down among them;—but a stone, and then another, and then a whole storm of stones flew through the windows, splinters of the broken glass whizzed about, and stones kept whirling round the room. She crept back again to her refuge. She was perspiring, as if the hottest rays of the sun were upon her, but she no longer wept, and her fear had left her.

Little by little the noise began to ebb; she ventured forth, and, as soon as nothing was to be heard, tried to get to the window; but she kept treading on crackling splinters of glass: she stepped back again, walking softly on the stones so as not to be heard; for now was the time for her to creep away. After waiting for more than half an hour, she took off her shoes, picked up her bundle, and softly opened the door. She waited another five minutes, and then walked gingerly down-stairs. It pained her deeply to have to leave her mother without farewell, after all the trouble she had brought upon her; but fear urged her on. "Good-bye, dear mother! Good-bye, dear mother!" she whispered to herself as she went down each step. "Good-bye, mother dear!"—and now she stood on the last step, and drew several long breaths, and then was at the door. Just then her arm was grasped from behind; she gave a faint scream, turned, and was face to face with her mother! Gunlaug, who had heard the door open, knew at once what Petra meant to do, and stood waiting for her. Petra felt that she would not get by without a struggle. Explanation would be of no avail; whatever she might say, she would not be believed. Well, let there be a struggle then! nothing in the world could be worse than the worst, and this she had lived through.

"Where are you going?" asked the mother in a low tone.

In equally low tones, but with a beating heart, answered Petra:

"I must go."

"Where will you go to?"

"That I don't know—but I must get away from *here!*"

She grasped her bundle tight and began to move again. But her mother held her arm, and said:

"Come, follow me—I have seen to this."

Straightway Petra gave herself up, as one might give up a burden far too heavy for one's strength; she drew long breaths, as if after a tough struggle, and resigned herself to her mother. The latter went into a little closet at the back of the kitchen, where there was no window, but in which a candle was burning; it was here she had sat in hiding, during the tumult without. The closet was so small, there was scarce room to move in it; the mother drew forth a bundle somewhat smaller than Petra's, opened it, and took out a seaman's dress.

"Put these on," she whispered.

Petra saw at once why she was to do so, but it touched her that her mother said never a word about it. She undressed, and put the other things on, her mother helping her, and as she did so, and the light fell upon her, Petra looked at her face, and saw for the first time that Gunlaug was old. Had she become so during these last two days, or had Petra never noticed it before? The child's tears rolled down upon the mother, but Gunlaug never looked up at her, so that Petra spoke no word. A sou'-wester was the last thing she had to put on; and when that was done the mother took her bundle from her, blew out the light, and whispered:

"Now come."

They went out into the passage, but not through the street door: Gunlaug opened the gate into the yard, and locked it again. They walked through the trampled garden, over uprooted trees, and past the broken hedge.

"You'd best look round you well now," said the mother; "you'll never come here again."

The other shuddered, but did not look round. They took the upper road, along the wood in which she had spent half her life—where she had been that evening with Gunnar, that evening with Yngve Vold, and that last one with Oedegaard. They were walking through the withered leaves that had now begun to fall. The night was icy cold, and Petra shivered in her unwonted clothes. The mother turned aside towards a garden, and Petra recognized it at once, though she had never been on that side of it since the day when, as a child, she had led the attack on it—for it was Pedro Ohlsen's orchard. The mother had a key, and opened the gate.

It had cost Gunlaug much to go to him that morning, and it cost her much more to come to him now with the luckless daughter whom she could no longer shelter. She rapped at the garden door, and almost at once steps were heard and a light was seen. A moment after the door was opened by Pedro, who stood inside, pale and scared, dressed in travelling clothes, and wearing travelling boots. He held a tallow candle in his hand, and he sighed as his eyes fell on Petra's face, all swollen with weeping. She looked up at him; but as he did not dare to recognize her, she did not venture to recognize him.

"This man has promised to help you to get away," said the mother, without looking at either of them, as she went a few steps up the passage, and the others followed her into Pedro's room on the opposite side. The room was small and low: the close, confined air smote upon them as they came in, and made Petra feel sick, for more than a day and night she had neither slept nor eaten. In the middle of the room there hung a cage with a canary in it, and they had to go round it to avoid striking it. The heavy old chairs and the solid table, the two great countrified presses

which almost touched the ceiling, dwarfed everything else, and seemed to make the room even more confined than it was. On the table lay music and a flute. Pedro Ohlsen slouched about in his great boots as if he were busily doing something. A faint voice from the room behind was heard, saying, "Who is that? who is in there?" which caused him to shuffle about still quicker, as he mumbled out, "Oh, it's—er, er, it's—er, er—," and finally went off to where the voice came from.

Gunlaug sat by the window with both elbows on her knees and her head on her hands. She looked fixedly down at the sand, with which the floor was strewn, but she said not a word, only at intervals she heaved deep sighs.

Petra stood by the door, her legs knocking together, and her hands pressed against her breast, for she was beginning to feel sick. An old-fashioned clock was ticking out the seconds; the tallow candle stood on the table with a long, guttering wick. Presently the mother tried to give a reason for their presence there.

"I used to know that man once," she said.

Not many words, and no answer. Pedro kept away. The light guttered melancholily, and the clock kept up its ticking. Petra was feeling more and more sick, and through it all her mother's "I used to know that man once," kept whistling in her ears. The clock took it up, and began to tick out, "I — used — to know — that — man — once." Whenever, in her subsequent life, Petra encountered close, faint air, that room straightway stood before her with the memories of her sickness and the clock's "I — used — to know — that — man — once." Whenever she went on a steamer, the smell of the oil, the bilge-water under the cabin, or the vapour of cooking meat, always made her feel sea-sick at once, and constantly through her sickness that room stood day and night before her eyes, and in her

ears was the sound of the clock ticking out its "I—used —to know—that—man—once."

When Pedro came in again he had put on a woollen cap and a clumsy, old-fashioned coat, which went up to his ears.

"I am ready," he said, and began to pull on his thick mittens, as if he were going out in the depths of winter. "But we mustn't forget" (he turned round) "the cloak for—for—;" and he looked at Petra, and from her to Gunlaug, who now took up a blue cloak which was hanging over the back of a chair, and helped Petra to put it on; but when she had the full odour of the place thus immediately beneath her nose, it was so overpowering that she begged for fresh air. Gunlaug saw she was not well, opened the door, and quickly led her out into the garden. Petra drank in long, full draughts of the fresh autumnal air in the cool night.

"Where am I going?" she asked, when she had begun to feel a little better.

"To Bergen," answered the mother, helping her to fasten her cloak; "it is a big town, where nobody knows you."

When she had finished she took her stand by the garden gate, and said:

"You will have 100 dollars to take with you; so that if you don't get on you'll then have something to fall back upon. This man here is going to lend it you."

"Give—give it!" whispered Pedro, as he passed them and went out into the road.

"Lend it you," repeated the mother, as if he had not spoken: "I shall pay him back again."

She took a handkerchief from her neck, tied it round Petra's, and said:

"You are to write to me as soon as you're getting on all right, but not before."

"Mother!"

"And this man will row you on board the ship that lies out there on the fjord."

"Oh, mother! Good God! dear mother——"

"And now there's nothing more. I shall go with you no further."

"Mother! mother!"

"God be with you. Farewell!"

"Mother, dear mother, forgive me!"

"And don't catch cold on the water."

She had gently pushed Petra outside the garden gate, and now she shut it from within.

Petra stood without the closed gate, and felt about as desolate and lonely as it is possible for mortal to feel; but just then, from out of the midst of her tears, her woes and her feeling of exile, there sprung up within her, as if by inspiration, a sudden confidence: like a tongue of fire that has been kindled and then quenched, it blazed high into the air and sunk down again, extinguished indeed, but, for one moment, gloriously bright. She opened her eyes, and stood once more in thick darkness.

In silence, through the deserted streets of the little town, by the close-shut, leafless gardens, past the houses, locked and lightless, she slowly followed the slouching form in the great boots and the long cloak that left him no head. They came out upon the avenues, and trod once more through the withered leaves, where the sere green branches stretched out long spectral arms to seize them. They climbed their way down across the hill to the yellow boat-house, where their skiff lay, and the man at once began busily to bale it. He rowed her out from the land, which now lay a black mass beneath the heavy skies. Fields, houses, forests, mountains, were all blotted out: nothing more could she now see of the things which till yesterday she had seen every day of her life. Like the town, like mankind, they

had locked themselves into the darkness of night; and she was cast out, and no voice bade her farewell.

A man was pacing up and down on the deck of the ship, as it lay at anchor waiting for the morning wind; as soon as he saw them under the ship's side, he lowered a rope-ladder, helped them on board, and told the captain of their arrival, who immediately came up on deck. She knew him, and he her; but without a question, or a word of sympathy, he told her, as if her being there was a matter of course, all that she needed to know—namely, where her berth was, and what she was to do if she wanted anything or felt sick. The latter she did almost as soon as she went down, and so directly she had changed her clothes she came up on deck again, where a fragrant odour met her. It was the smell of chocolate, and straightway a mighty feeling of hunger fell upon her, and seemed to tear and rend her breast; and just then up came the same man who had received them on board with a bowl-full of it and a lot of cakes from the cook-room; her mother had sent them, he said; and while she was eating, he went on to tell her that she had also sent on board a chest with her best clothes, her linen and woollen garments, as well as food and other useful things.

A vivid image of her mother same into her mind at that moment—a magnificent figure, such as she had never pictured her before, but never ceased to do all the rest of her life. And with it she made a vow, with confident yet humble prayer, that some time she would be able to give her mother some great joy in return for the sorrow that she caused her now.

Pedro Ohlsen sat beside her when she sat, and walked by her when she walked, trying hard not to be in her way, and consequently being always in the way on the deck, crowded as it was with goods. Of his face she could see nothing but the great nose and the eyes, nor could she see

these distinctly; yet he gave her the impression of being burdened with something he wanted to say, but could not. He sighed, sat down, got up, walked about round her, sat down again; but no word came from his lips, and she did not speak.

At length he felt he must give it up. He drew drearily out of his pocket a huge leather pocket-book, and whispered that the hundred dollars were in it, and a little more besides. She gave him her hand as she thanked him, and as she did so, his face was so near her that she could see his eyes dwelling upon her with a tearful glance, for with her the last remnant of life that had preserved his decaying existence was leaving him. What he wanted was to say something to her which should make her think lovingly of him when he, before long, should be no more; but he had been forbidden to do so; and though, spite of that, he would have done it, yet he could not manage it, for she gave him no help!

The truth was, Petra was exceedingly tired, and the recollection that he had been the cause of her first sin against her mother would not leave her. She could not bear to have him with her, and the longer he sat there the worse it grew, for when one is tired, one is apt to be peevish. The poor wretch felt this. It was time for him to be going, he said, and drew his withered hand out from beneath his mittens, and bade her a whispered farewell. She laid her warm hand in his, and both got up.

"Thanks," she said, "and take my greeting."

He gave a sigh, or rather a groan, then another one or two, let go her hand, turned, and walked backwards, and in silence, down the ship's ladder. She went to the bulwarks; he looked up, waved a farewell to her, took his seat in the boat, and rowed slowly off. She stood there till he was a black spot in the blackness around. Then she went below, for she could scarcely stand, so tired was she;

and though she felt sick the moment she came down, she had scarcely laid her head on the pillow, and said the first two or three lines of the Lord's Prayer, before she was asleep.

Meanwhile her mother sat by the yellow boat-house: she had slowly followed them the whole way, and sat there by the boat-house while they were putting off from the land. From the same spot, in days gone by, Pedro Ohlsen had put off with her from the land. That was long, long ago; but it must perforce come into her mind now, when he was rowing her daughter away.

As soon as she saw him coming back alone, she got up and went; for she knew by that that her daughter was safe on board. She did not take the road homewards, but finding in the darkness the path that led over the mountains, made her way along it. Her house in the town stood ruined and desolate for more than a month; she did not mean to go back till she had received good news from her daughter.

Meanwhile, the feeling against her was put to the proof. Meaner natures ever feel a secret joy in banding together to persecute a stronger one, but that only so long as the latter is able to make resistance; when they see that the other quietly puts up with ill-treatment, a feeling of shame comes upon them, and they hiss at anyone who now would cast a stone. The mob had rejoiced in the thought of hearing Gunlaug's mighty voice echoing down Hollow Street; they had in imagination seen her calling on the seamen for help, and stirring up a street-row.

As she refused to show herself, the people were well-nigh uncontrollable on the third night: they would break in after her; they would pitch the two women into the street; they would drive them, hunt them, out of the town. The windows had not been mended since the night before, and it was amidst tremendous cheering that two

men climbed through them to open the door; and then in stormed the whole crew!

They looked into every room, upstairs and downstairs; they burst the doors open; they broke into atoms all that stood in their way; they searched every corner, not excluding the cellar, but neither mother, nor daughter, nor any living thing could they find.

A sudden silence fell upon them all the moment the real state of things was made plain; those inside the house came out, one by one, and drew back behind the others. Presently the house was empty.

Before long, there were some in the town who said that it was a shameful thing to have acted thus towards two defenceless women.

They went on discussing the matter, until at last all were agreed that whatever wrong the Fisher Lassie might have done, it was certainly not Gunlaug's fault, and therefore she had been very unjustly treated. She was sorely missed in the town. Quarrels and disturbances arising from drink began to be the order of the day, for the town had lost its police. Folks missed her commanding figure in her doorway as they went by; and more than anyone else did the sailors miss her. No place was like hers had been, they said, for with her every man was treated according to his merits, and had his place in her confidence and her help whatever happened. Neither seamen nor skippers, neither employers nor housewives, had understood her real value till now that she had disappeared.

Therefore, an unanimous feeling of gladness ran through the town when it was said that someone had seen her in her dwelling, cooking and roasting as usual. Every one felt he must go and make certain for himself that the window-panes were replaced, the door mended, and the smoke curling out of the chimney.

Yes, it was all true; there she was again! They crept

up on the other side of Hollow Street to get a better view of her; she was sitting in front of the oven, and looking neither up nor down as her eye followed her hand, and her hand was busily working, for she had come back to earn again what she had lost, and first and foremost the hundred dollars that she owed to Pedro Ohlsen.

At first people were content with looking in on her—their evil conscience kept them from entering the house; but by degrees they began to come in. First came the housewives, the kind-hearted, friendly creatures; but they got no chance to talk anything but business with her, for Gunlaug gave no heed to anything else. Then came the fisher-folk, then shippers and skippers to hire sailors; and, last of all, on the first Sunday after her return, came the seamen. There must have been an agreement between them all to come that evening, for all of a sudden the house was so packed that not only were both the rooms fully occupied, but even the tables and chairs, which stood in the garden in summer-time, had to be brought in and put in the passage, in the kitchen, and in the back-parlour.

No one looking at this assembly would have guessed with what feelings those people sat there; for Gunlaug had resumed her silent sway over them again the moment they crossed her threshold, and the calm dignity with which she waited on each one turned aside all questions and all words of welcome. She was the same as ever, save that her hair was no longer black, and her bearing was somewhat quieter. But when the seamen began to grow merry they could no longer restrain themselves; and now, each time the servant left the room, they called upon Knud the boatswain, who had always been a favourite of hers, to drink her health when she came in again. He could not pluck up courage for it until he was somewhat warmer in the head; and then at last, when she came in and was putting together the empty bottles and glasses,

he rose and said: "It was a very good thing she was back again. For it was quite certain that—it was a very good thing she was back again."

This seemed to them a very neat speech, so they stood up and shouted: "Hear! Hear! a very good thing!" And those in the passage, and those in the kitchen, and those in the other room, got up and joined in accord; and the boatswain gave her a glass and shouted "Hurrah!" and then they hurrahed all together, as if they were trying to raise the roof to the skies. Presently somebody said that they had done her shameful injustice, another took his oath they had, and soon they were all declaring and swearing that they had done her most shameful injustice.

When at last there was quiet again, as they wanted a word from Gunlaug, she said that she thanked them very much; "but," she added, as she went on gathering the empty glasses and bottles into a pile, "so long as I say nothing about it, you don't need to either." She went out with as large a pile of glasses as she could carry, and came back again for the others; but ever after that her power was absolute.

## CHAPTER VII.

### "THE GREATEST CALLING ON EARTH."

IN the evening and in darkness the ship cast anchor in Bergen harbour. Half dazed with sea-sickness, Petra was taken in the captain's boat through a number of ships, great and small; then through the crowd of ferrymen on the quays; then through the shoal of peasants and street-boys in the narrow streets through which their way ran. They stopped before a pretty little house, where an old woman, at the captain's introduction, gave Petra a kindly welcome. She needed food and sleep, and both her cravings were soon satisfied. Fresh and bright did she feel when she awoke at mid-day, next day, to new sounds and new voices around her, and—when the curtain was drawn aside—to new scenery, new people, and a new town. She was herself a new person, it seemed to her, as she stopped before the glass; her face was not as of old. She could not see what exactly it was that made this difference, for she did not know that at her age sorrow and anguish make the face more delicate and spiritual; but as she saw herself in the glass, she could not keep her thoughts from the past few nights, and as she thought of them, she trembled. So she made haste to get ready to come down-stairs to the new world awaiting her there. She found her hostess and

several other ladies, who first looked her up and down from top to toe, and then promised to look after her; as a beginning they proposed showing her round the town. There were several things that she wanted to buy, so she ran up-stairs for her pocket-book, but not caring to bring the great clumsy book down with her, she opened it in her room and took out the money. She found not 100 dollars, but 300! So Pedro Ohlsen had given her money again without her mother's knowledge or consent! So little did she know the value of it, that the greatness of the sum did not surprise her: therefore it never occurred to her to guess at the possible reasons for such great liberality. Instead of a letter beaming with gratitude, with perhaps a question or two of surmise, Pedro Ohlsen got a letter from Gunlaug that her daughter had written her, in which, with scarce concealed anger against him, she betrayed her benefactor and asked what she was to do with the money he had smuggled in.

The first thing that struck upon Petra's senses in the town was its scenery. She could not get rid of the feeling that the mountain was hanging close above her head, and that she must be careful how she went. Each time she raised her eyes, she felt a sense of oppression, coupled with an inclination to stretch out her hands and knock on it to get free. At times, too, it seemed that there was no outlet for her. Sun-forsaken and murk stood the mountain there: the clouds hung close about it and whirled around its head; wind and rain strove below in constant alternation: they came from the mountain, the mountain set them free and poured them out over the town. But over the throng of people around her was no such feeling of oppression: she grew cheerful among them at once, for in their activity there lay a light-hearted, merry freedom, such as she had never known, and which seemed to her, after what she had lately gone through, like a welcoming smile. Next day at

dinner she said that she would like to go where there were plenty of people, and was told that she had better go to the theatre then, for there she would see many hundreds under one roof. Yes, she would like it, she said; and a ticket was got for her to the theatre close at hand: she was taken there, and her place pointed out to her in the first row of the balcony. She sat among many hundred happy faces in a great blaze of light, with gay colours sparkling around her, and a hum of talk from all quarters, breaking around her like the noise of the billows.

Petra had not the least idea of what she was going to see. All that she knew was what she had learnt from Oedegaard, or picked up in chance talk. Now Oedegaard had never spoken a word to her about such things; the seamen had only told her of theatres where there were wild beasts and riders of bare-backed horses, and the lads she had talked with had never said anything about plays, even if they had learnt something of them at school. Her little town had no theatre, nor even a building fit for the purpose; travelling circuses, rope-dancers and merry-andrews, either made use of a warehouse or the open fields. She was so ignorant of it all, that she did not even think of asking: she sat there in cheerful expectation of some wonderful thing, as, for instance, camels, or perhaps monkeys. Occupied with thoughts of this, she gradually began to see animals in every face around her, and it amused her to find in them horses, dogs, foxes, cats, mice, and so forth, so that the orchestra had got into their places without her noticing it. She gave a sudden start when the overture began with a short, sharp crash of drums, cymbals, bassoons and horns: never in her life had she heard music from more than a couple of fiddles at a time, with perhaps a flute. The crashing glory of the music made her turn pale, for it seemed to her like the roaring of the cold, black sea: she sat fearing that what came next might be more terrible, but yet she did not want it to

stop. Presently gentler harmonies broke upon her, and visions flocked in upon her such as she had never seen in her dreams of old. Sweet melodies were in the air above, gladness and life floating around her; all seemed to be moving upward on mighty wings, anon gently sinking again; now drawing majestically together, now gaily and merrily breaking apart—when lo! a great darkness fell upon all and overwhelmed it, and all was swept away in a roaring cataract. But then uprose one single strain, as of a bird on a bough wet with spray, from the depths beneath; sadly and timidly it began, but with its song the air above grew clearer, and the sun began to peep forth: and now again long blue vistas opened before her, filled with wondrous flickering shapes in the sun's golden rays. Lo now! after a while the song was quietly dying away: the joyous hosts drew farther and farther off, and nothing was there save the glow of the sun, softening and permeating the air; only the sun, with endless space beneath lit up and silent in its rays: and she sat dreaming in radiant happiness. Involuntarily she rose when the music stopped; for her bright visions stopped too! But see! O wonder! the beautiful painted wall in front of her was going up to the roof! She was in a church, a church with arches and pillars, with the sound of the organ thrilling it, a church beautifully adorned, and people were coming towards her in dresses which she did not recognize, aye, and talking—yes, talking in the church, and in a tongue that she did not understand. What was that? there were voices behind her too. "Sit down!" they were saying, but as there was nothing to sit on, the two in the church naturally remained standing; and the longer she looked at them, the clearer it grew to her that their garments were like those she had seen in a picture of Saint Olaf,—and he, he was surely saying Saint Olaf's name! "Sit down!" she heard from behind again; "Sit down!" many voices were shouting. "There must be

something behind there as well," thought Petra, and turned quickly round. A sea of angry faces, some of them looking threatening, met her gaze. "There must be something wrong somewhere," said Petra to herself, and was about to go, when an old lady who sat beside her gently pulled at her dress and whispered: "But why don't you sit down, my dear? those behind can't see, you know!" In a moment she was in her seat again. "Why, of course, it's the theatre down there, and we're looking at—of course, the theatre!" And she went on repeating the word as if to keep herself aware of it. She looked down into the church again, but she could not, in spite of all her pains, understand a word the man who was speaking said; but gradually, when she had grasped the fact that he was a young and handsome man, she took in a word here and there; and when she found that he was in love and talking of love, she began to understand it all. Then a third person entered, who for the moment distracted her attention from him, for she saw from his dress that he must be a monk, and a monk she had often longed to see. Very quietly and gently did the monk walk about; he had a truly pious look, and he spoke so plainly and deliberately that she could follow every word. But all of a sudden he turns aside, and says the very opposite of what he has just been saying. Good God! he is a villain! Listen to him, he must be a villain; and see how he looks it now! Cannot that handsome young man see that? In any case, cannot he hear it?

"He is deceiving you!" she cried, beneath her breath.

"Hush!" said the old lady.

No, the young man did not hear it: he went away in dangerous confidence; and then the others went. Now an old man comes in. Why, what is this? When the old man speaks it sounds as if the young one was speaking, and yet he is an old man. But look, look at that! A

gleaming host of white-clad maidens, silently, and two by two, are slowly walking through the church. They were present to her thoughts long after she ceased to see them, and there swept before her eyes a sight that came from her childhood's days. She had been taken by her mother one winter over the mountain. As they walked along in the new-fallen snow they inadvertently startled a brood of ptarmigan, who suddenly filled the air about them: the birds were white, the snow was white, the woods were white; for a long while all her thoughts were of white things, and now for a moment here in the theatre it was the same.

But now one of these white-clad maidens steps forth alone with a wreath in her hands, and kneels down; the old man is also on his knees, and she is talking with him. He has evidently tidings and letters for her from a foreign land. He draws the letter out, and it is easy to see that it must be from him she loves. Ah, how delightful! they certainly all love one another here. She opens it. Why, it's no letter, for it is full of music. But look, look! he himself is the letter. The old man is the young one, and is he whom she loves. They embrace one another. Dear God, they are kissing! Petra felt she was getting fiery-red, and hid her face in her hands, but went on listening. Hark! he is telling her that they must go and be married at once, and she laughingly pulls his beard, and says he's become a barbarian; and he says she's grown so beautiful, and gives her a ring, and promises her scarlet and velvet, golden shoes, and a golden sash; and merrily he bids her farewell as he goes off to the king to tell him of the bridal. His betrothed looks after him with a look that lights up everything; and when he is gone, and she turns, everything seems blank and dull.

Then suddenly the painted wall comes down again. Can it be over yet?—just as it was beginning. She turned, with a blush, to the old lady:

"Is it over?"

"No, no, child! that was the first act. There are five of them: yes, that there are," she repeated, with a sigh,—"five of them."

"Five of the same?" asked Petra.

"What do you mean, the same?"

"Do the same people come in and out, and the same things go on?"

"Why, surely you can never have been at a play before, have you?"

"No."

"No! Ah, well, it's true there are many places that have no theatre: it costs so much."

"But what is it all?" asked Petra, excitedly, and looking at her as if she could not wait her answer: "who are these people?"

"They are Naso's company, and a wonderfully good company it is: he's such a clever manager."

"And does he make it all up? or what is it all? For God's sake, do tell me?"

"My dear child, don't you really know what a play is? Why, *where* can you have come from?"

But these last words brought to Petra's mind the memory of her native place, her shame, and her flight. She sank into silence, and did not venture to ask any more questions.

The second act came on, and with it the king: yes, it was certainly the king. So she had actually got to see a king! She did not hear what he was saying, nor see to whom he was talking; she was too busy observing the king's clothes, the king's bearing, the king's gestures. Her thoughts were not drawn from this till the young man came in. And now they all departed to fetch the bride; so she must again wait awhile.

Between the acts the old dame leant over to her, and whispered:

"Don't you think they're acting splendidly?"

"Acting!" said Petra, looking at her in amazement: "acting! what is that?"

She did not notice that all around were looking at her, and that the old woman had been egged on to ask; she did not hear them laughing at her as they sat there.

"Why don't they speak like we do?" she asked, as the old woman had made her no answer.

"That's because they're Danes," replied the other, and began to laugh anew.

Then Petra perceived that she was being laughed at for her many questions; so she sat silent, and looked steadily at the curtain.

When it rose again she had the great joy of seeing an archbishop, and, as before, grew so absorbed in watching him, that she did not hear a word of what he was saying. Then there was the sound of music, faint in the distance, but it was coming nearer. There was song from women's voices, and the sound of flutes and violins, and of an instrument which was not a guitar, yet was like many guitars, only softer, fuller, and more mellow. The harmonies mingled, and broke in long waves, and called up flowing visions of colours, and in came the procession: Soldiers with halberds, choir boys with censers, monks with burning tapers, and the king with a crown on his head, and at his side the bridegroom, clad in white. Then came the white-clad girls again, strewing roses, singing songs, before the bride, who was clothed in white samite, and had a red wreath on her head; by her side walked a tall woman, in a robe of purple, with golden crowns worked over it, and a small crown of shining gold on her head: that must surely be the queen. The whole church was filled with music and colour, and all that now took place—from the bridegroom leading the bride to the altar and kneeling before it, while all the rest kneeled round them, to the arch-

bishop's entrance, surrounded by his train of priests—were merely fresh links in the chain of glowing music.

But just as the wedding ceremony was to begin, the archbishop raised his staff on high and forbade it; their marriage was forbidden by the laws of the Church: never, never in this life might they have one another. O God, have mercy! The bride fell swooning, and Petra, who had risen to her feet, likewise fell back—and with a piercing shriek.

"Water! bring water!" cried the people near her.

"No," answered the old dame, "it is not wanted; she has not fainted"

"It is not wanted," repeated others. "Silence there!"

"Silence!" came the cry from the stalls and pit. "Silence in the balcony!"

"Silence!" came the answer back from the balcony.

"You must not take it to heart so, dear," whispered the old woman, "it's only sham and acting; but, indeed, Madam Naso acts this part remarkably well."

"Silence!" cried Petra too, for she was already deep in the plot again. The fiendish monk had come in with a sword; the two lovers had to take up a piece of cloth and he cut it in twain between them, as the Church parts them asunder, as pain cuts into men's heart, as of yore the sword above Paradise gate cut off return to it. Weeping women took the bride's red wreath and gave her a white one, which was to bind her to the cloister all the days of her life. He, whose she was for all time and eternity, was to know her alive and never touch her hand; know her within those walls, and never see her. How heart-rending was their farewell to one another! Surely never on earth was sorrow such as theirs!

"Good God!" whispered the old dame to her, as the curtain fell, "don't be so foolish, child; that's only Madam Naso, the manager's wife."

Petra looked at her with widely-opened eyes. She thought the woman must be mad; and as that had long been the other's opinion of Petra, they gave up talking, but kept looking at one another out of the corners of their eyes.

When the curtain rose again, Petra no longer followed the play; for it was the bride she saw, within the cloister walls, and the bridegroom living night and day in desperation without them. She suffered their sufferings and joined in their prayers; what was actually going on before her eyes made no mark on her senses. Suddenly a foreboding silence recalled her to the stage: the empty church seemed to grow bigger and bigger: no sound was there but the clock striking twelve. A dull booming sound is coming from the vaulted aisles; the walls tremble; tall and terrible the holy Olaf arises from his shrine in his cere-cloth; spear in hand he comes striding along; the watchmen flee; out crashes the thunder; and the monk falls pierced through and through by the outstretched spear: then all is darkness, and the vision has passed away. But the monk lies there a heap of ashes, that the lightning has struck down.

Without being herself aware of it, Petra had clutched hold of the old lady, who had been rather frightened by her convulsive grasp, and now, seeing her turning paler and paler, hastened to speak.

"Goodness gracious, child! that's only Knutsen; this is the only part he can do well, because his voice is so thick."

"No, no, no!" said Petra; "I saw the light about his head, and the church tremble under his tread!"

"Will you be quiet there?" came from all directions "put them out, if they can't be quiet."

"Silence in the balcony!" cries the pit.

"Silence in the pit!" cries the balcony in answer.

Petra shrunk away as if for shelter, but soon had forgotten everything else, for the lovers were there again, the lightning had burst forth for their aid; let them fly now! They are with one another; they are embracing one another. Protect them now, thou God on high!

Suddenly breaks forth the sounds of shouting and of trumpets; the bridegroom is torn from her side to fight for his fatherland; he is wounded to death; dying, he greets his bride. Petra did not understand what had really happened until the bride comes quietly on—and sees his dead body! Then it is as if all the clouds of sorrow were gathered above that spot; but a gleam of light disperses them; the bride looks up from the dead man's breast and prays that God Almighty will let her die! Heaven opens at her glance, the lightning blazes forth; the bridal-chamber is up there on high—let the bride enter! Ah truly, she can already see it, for from her eyes streams forth peace, like the peace on yonder lofty mountain. Her eyelids sink; the struggle has been rewarded with divine victory, their steadfast faith has its greater than earthly crown; she is with him now.

Long sat Petra silent, her heart uplifted in faith, her soul filled with the strength of their great strength. She rose high above all that was petty, above all fear and grief: she rose with a smile for all, for all were her brothers and sisters. Evil that parts mankind no longer existed; it lay crushed to atoms beneath the Thunderer's spear. People who saw her smiled back at her, for this was she who had been half out of her senses during the play; but she saw nothing in their smile, save the reflection of the victory she herself had won. In the faith that they smiled in sympathy with her, she beamed back at them so radiantly, that they were forced to smile with her feelings. She walked down the broad stairs between two moving rows of people, her joy shedding joy around her

among them, the beauty that floated over her radiating beauty over them. The bright gleams within us are sometimes so mighty, that we throw light on all around us, even though we ourselves cannot see it. 'Tis the greatest triuumph in this world to be heralded, borne along, and followed by one's own radiant thoughts.

When, without knowing how, she had got home again, she asked what it had all been. There were several people there who understood her, and whose answers helped her. And when she had fully grasped what a play was, and what great actors were able to do, she rose up and said:

"That is the greatest calling on earth: I will be an actress!"

To the astonishment of all she put on her things and went out again; she felt she must be alone and in the open air. She walked away from the town and on to the cape near at hand, where the wind was blowing strong and fresh. The sea was thundering below, but the town lay a little way off, on both sides of the bay, with a misty glow above it, through which numberless isolated lights were struggling, without being able to do more than light up the veil they could not lift. It was an emblem of her soul, it seemed to her. The great dark ocean at her feet gave forth a hollow sound of warning from fathomless depths; either must she sink into them or join with those who were struggling to give light. She asked herself how it was that she had never before had such thoughts, and the answer came to her that it was because only the actual moment had sway with her; but she felt that at such moments she had indeed power. This, too, she saw: just so many moments would be given her as there were sparkling lights in the mist yonder, and she prayed God so to make them give full light that none of them might have been kindled by Him in vain.

She rose up, for the wind was now icy cold. She had not

been long away; but when she came home again she knew what way she must henceforth tread.

* * * * * *

Next morning she stood before the manager's door. She could hear a noise as of people loudly scolding within; one of the voices seemed to her to be like that of the bride of last night; it was true it was now speaking in a very different way, but still it had power to make Petra tremble. She waited for a long while, but as it never seemed likely to leave off, she knocked at the door.

"Come in!" cried the wrathful voice of a man. "Oh!" cried the woman's voice, and Petra opened the door to see a flying shape in a night-gown and with hair wild about her, disappearing in frightened haste by another door. The manager, a tall man with a pair of fierce eyes, over which he at once put on his gold-rimmed glasses, was excitedly walking up and down the room. His long nose so lorded it over his face, that all the rest seemed to be there for its sake: his eyes looked like two gun-barrels behind the ramparts, his mouth was the moat before it, and his forehead a light bridge from it to the forest or outworks.

"What do you want?" he asked gruffly, pausing in his march. "Is it you who wants to be a chorus-girl?" he added abruptly.

"Chorus-girl? what is that?"

"O, you don't know what that is, I see; very well, then, what is it you want?"

"I want to be an actress."

"O, you want to be an actress, do you?—and you don't know what a chorus-singer is even. I see. Well, but you speak a dialect."

"Dialect? what is that?"

"O, so you don't know what a dialect is, and you want to be an actress, do you? I see. Well, that is just like all

Norwegians. By dialect, I mean that you don't speak as we do."

"No, but I've been trying to all this morning."

"O, have you? Come, come; let me hear you."

Petra struck an attitude, and said like the bride did yesterday:

"I greet thee, sweet love, good morrow to thee."

"Devil take it, I do believe you've come here to make fun of my wife!"

A peal of laughter came from the next room, and the manager opened the door and called out, without seeming to remember in the slightest that they had been engaged in mortal quarrel a moment before:

"Do come here, my dear, and look: here's a chit of a Norse girl who's trying to caricature you."

The head of a woman with untidy, stubborn-looking black hair, black eyes, and a large mouth, did actually look into the room and laugh. Nevertheless Petra hurried up to her; for this must be the bride. "No," thought she, as she came nearer; "her mother, I suppose." She looked at the lady and said: "I really don't know—was it you?—or are you her mother?"

Now it was the manager's turn to laugh; the lady had drawn her head back, but continued to laugh from her room.

Petra's confusion was so strongly shown by her face, her bearing, the play of her features, that the manager began to look at her with more attention. He watched her for a moment, then took up a book and said, as if nothing in the world had taken place:

"Take this and read something, my lass; but read it just as you yourself talk."

She did so at once.

"No, no; that's idiotic; listen!" And he read aloud to her and she after him, reading exactly as he did.

"No, no; that's utterly wrong. Read Norse; d— it all, read Norse!" And Petra read aloud once more.

"No, I tell you, no! that's stark raving madness. Don't you understand what I say? Are you an idiot?"

She tried again and again, and he gave her another book.

"See now, that's just the opposite sort of thing; this is comic; read it!"

Petra read it, but with the same results, until at last he grew tired and cried out:

"Come, come, no more of this! Deuce take it, what do you want on the stage? Hang it all, what is it you want to be playing?"

"I want to act what I saw yesterday."

"O, do you? of course you do? Well, what then?"

"Why," she answered much disconcerted, "it seemed to me yesterday as if it was all so splendid, but to-day I thought how much finer it would be if it could have a happy ending; so I wanted to alter——"

"O, so you wanted to alter, did you? I see. Well, there's nothing to prevent you. The writer is dead, so of course he can't correct it any more, and you who can neither speak nor read will naturally be able to improve his work. Yes, that's your Norwegian all over!"

Petra did not understand a word of all this, but she felt that it was going amiss with her, and she began to grow anxious.

"Mustn't I do it?" she asked him timidly.

"O, of course; there's nothing in the world to hinder you. In God's name, go and do it! Listen to me!" he said, suddenly changing his tone and walking straight up to her: "You have no more notion of acting than a cat. I have tried you both in tragedy and in comedy, and you have talent for neither. Because you've got a pretty face and a fine figure, people have put it into your head, I've no doubt, that you can easily act far better than my wife, and

so you want to play at once the greatest rôle in the *repertoire* and alter it into the bargain. O well, that is just like your Norwegians; they are the people to do that kind of thing."

Petra had been drawing her breath quicker and quicker and now she could scarcely speak; at last she ventured to say in a low voice:

"May I really not be allowed to, then?"

He had got up and gone to the window, and thought that she was sure to have gone by now; he turned round in angry annoyance: but the sight of her consternation and the marvellously vivid way in which it was shewn by her whole bearing made him pause for a moment; he suddenly darted upon a book, and in a voice and manner from which every trace of the past was again blotted out, he said,—

"Take this; read this piece, and read it slowly, just to let me hear your voice. Now, read away."

But she could not read; she could not even see the letters.

"Come, don't be down-hearted," he said.

At last she managed to read, bnt without warmth or spirit; he bade her read again, "with more feeling;" this proved even worse than before. Then he quietly took the book from her and said:

"Now I've tried you in every possible way, so I feel I've nothing to reproach myself with. I assure you, my dear young lady, that if I was to send you or my boots upon the stage, it would make about the same impression—and a very remarkable one it would be. And that's enough now, I think."

But as a last effort, Petra plucked up courage to say:—

"I think that I don't quite understand—but if I only could get to——"

"O yes, yes of course! every little fishing village knows far more about it than we do; the Norwegian public is the

most enlightened one in the world.—Come, come now, if you won't go, I will."

She turned to the door and burst into tears.

"Listen," he said, for her violent emotion kindled a light on him; "was it not you who made a disturbance in the theatre last night?"

She turned red as fire and looked at him.

"Ah, I see it must have been: now I know you, you're 'Fisher-lassie.' After the play, I was with a gentleman from your native town; he 'knew all about you.' So that's why you want to go on the stage, is it? you want to try your arts there, do you? Very good; but listen to me; *my* theatre is a respectable place; I won't permit any attempts of that sort here. Now go!—be off with you, I say!"

But Petra was already through the doorway, bitterly sobbing as she went down the stairs and out into the street. She wept as she ran through the crowded thoroughfare, and a woman running weeping through the streets attracted, as was natural, considerable notice. Men stood still to look, little boys ran after her, and soon there was a crowd following; in the noise at her heels Petra heard the cries that had echoed through her attic, she could see the faces in the air again, and away she tore. But her recollection grew apace with every step she took, and so also did the noise behind her; when she had reached the house, closed the street-door, got into her room and bolted the door, she flung herself into a corner and tried to ward off the eyes that were on her; she kept them off with her hands and with threatening gestures, until at last she sank down exhausted—and was saved.

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That same afternoon, towards twilight, she was on her way from Bergen into the country. She did not know whither she was bound, but she was determined to go

somewhere where she was not known. She sat in the carriole with her box tied on behind her and the driver sitting on it; it was raining in torrents as she sat crouching beneath a great umbrella and looking gloomingly out at the mountain above her and the precipices down below at her side. The forest in front of her was a dark mass of mist peopled with ghostly shapes; next moment she would be amongst them, but ever the dark haze kept moving backwards as she drew nearer to it. A mighty crashing noise, growing louder every instant, added to her feeling of journeying through a mystic land, wherein everything had its own meaning and its dark connexion with the rest, and where mortal man was but a timid wayfarer, who must use his eyes well if he wished to fare onwards. The noise was the sound of many a waterfall that, swollen by the rain, had grown to gigantic size and now plunged headlong from rock to rock with thundering roar. Their way frequently took them over narrow bridges, and she could see the water seething in the depths below. Sometimes the path curled and wound about; here and there lay cultivated land with a few turf-thatched houses on it; then, again, their road went up the mountains and towards the crags and the forest. She was wet and very cold, but she meant to go on and on so long as there was daylight; next day she would go on still further, and keep on going further and further inland, until at last she found some place where she dared trust herself. In this the Almighty God would help her, she felt, He who was now guiding her through the night and the tempest.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SIGNE AND HER PARENTS.

AMONG the mountains of the Bergen district, in the sheltered and fertile valleys, a mild autumn sometimes brings warm summer-like days with it long after the fall of the year. At such times the cattle are turned out to pasture for a while in the middle of the day, even though they have already been put into their stalls for winter fodder; the beasts are then apt to get plump and fresh, and make a lusty show when they are brought back again in the afternoon to the farmstead.

Just as Petra was about to pass one of these farms the cattle were coming down the mountain-path; cows, sheep, and goats, lowing, baa-ing, and bleating, as they danced along into the large yard to the music of their bells. It was delicious weather, and the long white wooden building with its tall windows stood glittering in the sunlight; the firs, the birches, the mountain-ash, and the wild cherry-trees on the mountain above and the briars on the crags around stood so thick together that the house looked as if kept warm by them. A garden lay by the roadside in front of the main building: it was full of apple, pear, and cherry-trees, and above them all towered some grand old ash-trees with their spreading crowns. The house lay like

a nest, hidden among green branches, and not to be approached by aught save the sun. But it was just this look of being hidden that awaked Petra's desire, and when the sun shone on the panes and the merry bells rang out alluringly, and Petra learned that the place belonged to a clergyman, she suddenly seized the reins, and crying out, "I must go in here," turned aside from the road and into the garden.

A pair of Finland hounds flew forth barking as she drove into the courtyard, which was a large enclosed square, with cattle-sheds facing the main building, a wing of the dwelling-house on the right, and a wash-house and servants' rooms on the left. This space was now full of cattle, and in their midst stood a lady of middle height and graceful build; she wore a close-fitting dress and a little silk kerchief on her head; round about her and almost upon her were goats—white goats, black goats, brown goats, pied goats—each with its little tuneful bell; she had a name for each of the goats, and something nice for them all in the bowl which the dairy-maid kept filling for her. On the low steps which led from the main building into the yard stood the priest with a dish of salt in his hands, and in front of the steps stood the cows licking the salt from his hands and from the flag-stones on which he was strewing it. The priest was not a big man, but he was squarely built; his neck was short, his forehead narrow; his bushy eyebrows jutted out over his eyes—eyes that rarely looked straight at anything, but darted out deep side-glances every now and then. His hair was short, thick, and grey; it stood up all over his head, and grew nearly as thickly down on his neck as it did up above; he wore no neck-cloth, and his shirt, in which there was a collar-stud, was open so that his furry chest was bared to the air; nor were his wristbands fastened, so that they hung about the small, wiry, and just now very dirty hands

with which he was giving the cattle salt; his hands and arms alike were all covered with hair. He gave a sharp, quick side-glance at the stranger, who had now got down from the carriole and worked her way through the goats up to his daughter. It was not possible for him to hear what they were talking about, because of the kine, dogs, and goats; but he saw both of them were moving towards him, and, with the goats around them, they came up to the steps. A farm-lad drove the cattle off at a sign from the priest, and Signe, his daughter, cried to him—and Petra could not fail to notice the sweetness of her voice—"Father, here is a lady who is on a journey, and would like to rest a day with us."

"She is very welcome here!" cried the priest, and giving the salt-dish to a servant, went into his own room, on the right side of the building—probably to cleanse himself and arrange his clothes. Petra went with the young lady into the passage, which was really a hall, it was so airy and roomy; the post-boy was paid, her luggage brought in, and she herself shown into a room opposite the priest's study, where she made some little alteration in her dress before going out again into the passage to be taken to the family sitting-room.

What a large, bright room it was! Nearly the whole side that lay towards the garden was taken up with windows, the middle one being a glass-door leading into it. The windows were broad and high, they ran almost down to the floor, and were filled with flowers; flowers stood on stands about the room; flowers stood on the window-sills; and for curtains, ivy trailed down from two small flower-pots which hung high up on the top of the window-frame. It was like going into a green-house built in the midst of a garden, for there were bushes and flowers outside, beside the wall, on it, and above it, and away on the land in front. And yet you forgot to look at the flowers before

you had been in that room for one minute; it was the church you looked at, as it lay high up on that peaceful hill on your right, and the blue waters which mirrored its image and flowed shining far away among the mountains, so that you knew not whether it was a lake or an arm of the sea. And then those mountains themselves! Not isolated peaks, but height upon height, the mighty masses standing one behind the other, as if here were the limit of land for human dwelling.

When at last Petra withdrew her eyes, the whole room seemed to her hallowed by the scene without; it was the pure and bright flower-frame for that magnificent picture. She felt that some invisible power was surrounding her, giving heed to her doings, yea, to her very thoughts; she walked about examining and touching the things around her without being aware of it. Her eye fell upon a painting above the sofa on the wall that faced the light; it was a full-length portrait of a lady, who seemed to be smiling down at her. She sat with her head slightly aside, her hands folded, and her right arm resting on a book, on the cover of which was painted in legible letters the title, "Sunday's Book." Her fair, shining hair, and clear skin seemed to beam down Sabbath calm upon all on whom her eye fell. Her smile was earnest with the earnestness of resignation. She seemed to have the power of drawing everyone near to her in bonds of love; she seemed to understand everyone, for in all she saw only all that was good. Her face bore the marks of suffering, but that suffering must have been her strength, for assuredly no one could ever have dared to have pained such a one. A wreath of immortelles hung over the frame; she was dead!

"That was my mother," said a soft voice behind Petra, and she turned and saw the daughter, who had gone out and come back again. And now the whole room seemed filled with the portrait; everything led up to it; every-

thing took its colour from it; everything else was placed there for its sake; and the daughter herself was a calm reflection of it. Something quieter the latter seemed, a trifle more reserved. The mother welcomed every look and returned it with glad thanks; the daughter's eyes dropped beneath another's; but there was the same mildness and gentleness in her glance. She had also her mother's figure, but without any trace of weakness; on the contrary, the quick colours in her close-fitting dress, in her apron and her little kerchief with its Roman pin, gave her appearance a bright look of health and a gracefulness and a sense for it that made her alike the daughter of the portrait and the fairy of the place. As she walked among her mother's flowers, Petra felt strongly drawn towards her. With this girl's friendship, and in that homestead, all that was good in her would surely develop! Ah, if she could only stay within it! She felt doubly her desolation, and her eyes now followed Signe as she walked about and as she stood still. Signe perceived this and tried to avoid her eyes, but this availing her nothing, she grew disconcerted and bent down over her flowers. At length, Petra saw how rudely she was behaving, and would have made a shamefaced apology; but there was something in the carefully arranged hair, the delicate forehead, and the close-fitting dress, that warned her to beware of what she did. She looked up at the mother. Ah! *she*, she felt, would long ago have embraced her! Was it not even now as if she were bidding her welcome? Dared she trust to that? No one had ever looked at her so before. In that look she could read that the mother knew all that had befallen the poor wanderer, and could forgive it all. Petra's heart was yearning for kindness, and she could not move from beneath those kind eyes. She leant her head to one side and folded her hands like the portrait, and turned round thus almost without being conscious of it.

"Let me stay here," came from her lips.

Signe raised herself and turned towards her, unable to speak for astonishment.

"Let me stay here!" begged Petra again, and took a step towards her, "it's so lovely here!" and the tears stood in her eyes.

"I will ask father to come," said Signe, and Petra followed her with her eyes till she disappeared through the study door. But the moment she was alone, fear fell upon her for what she had done, and she trembled when she saw the priest's astonished face in the doorway. He came in, somewhat more neatly dressed than before, and with a pipe, which he held tightly in his hand and took from between his lips after every whiff, blowing out the smoke in three puffs, each with a little sigh of appreciation. He did this several times as he stood in the middle of the room in front of Petra, not looking at her, but evidently waiting for her to speak. But she did not dare to repeat her request in this man's presence, for he looked so grave and stern.

"You wish to remain here, do you not?" he asked at last, and flashed a sharp, quick side-glance at her.

"I have nowhere to go to," she answered, her voice trembling with nervousness.

"Where do you come from?"

In a low voice Petra told him her name and that of her town.

"Why have you come here?"

"I do not know—I am looking for—I will pay for myself—I—O I don't know!" She turned aside and for a moment could get no further: then plucking up heart again, went on: "I will do all you ask me, if only I may stop here and not have to journey on any more—and not have to ask any more."

The daughter had come in again with her father and was

by the fireplace, where she stood with downcast eyes and hands busy among the withered rose-leaves. The priest made no answer; there was no sound save the puffs from his pipe, as he stood looking at Petra, his daughter and the portrait. Now it often happens that the same object produces widely different impressions in different people, and while Petra was silently praying the portrait to make him lenient to her, to him it seemed that it was whispering: "Protect our child! let no unknown stranger be her companion!" He turned round to Petra with a sharp side-glance: "No!" he said, "you cannot stop here!"

Petra turned pale, heaved a violent, deep sigh, looked wildly around her, and darting into an adjacent room, the door of which stood half open, she flung herself down by the table and gave way to all her grief and bitter disappointment! Father and daughter looked at one another; her want of manners in thus bursting into another room and seating herself there alone and unasked, could only be equalled by her conduct in coming in from the highway, begging to be allowed to stay there, and then bursting out crying when refused. The priest went after her; not to talk to her but, on the contrary, to shut the door behind her. He came back, his face all flushed, and said softly to his daughter, who was still standing by the stove:

"Did you ever see the like of this woman? Who is she? What is it she wants?"

The daughter did not at once answer, but when she did, she said in a still lower tone than her father:

"She behaves very oddly, but there's something very singular about her."

The priest paced up and down looking at the door. At length he paused, and said under his breath:

"I don't think she can have all her wits about her, do you?" and as Signe made no answer, he came nearer and

repeated more decidedly :—" She is mad, Signe, half-crazy, in fact: that's what's singular about her."

He began to walk up and down again, and thoughts of other things came into his mind so that he had nearly forgotten what he had last said, when his daughter at last softly replied:

"I don't think she can be mad," she said, "but she is certainly very unhappy," and she bent her head again over the dry rose-leaves among which her fingers were busy.

Neither her movements nor the tone of her voice would have struck anybody else as noticeable, but her father was straightway an altered man as he walked up and down, looking at the portrait, and at last said in very low tones:

"Do you think then, because she's unhappy, that mother would have asked her to stop?"

"Mother would not have answered for some days," answered the daughter in a whisper, as she bent still lower over the rose-leaves.

The slightest remembrance of the mother up there, when the daughter thus brought it before him, was enough to make that shaggy lion's head mild as a lamb's. He felt at once the truth of what she said, and stood before her like a boy at school caught cribbing. He forgot to smoke; he left off walking about. At last he whispered:

"Shall I ask her to stay a few days?"

"You've already given her your answer."

"Yes; but its one thing to let her live here and another to let her stay a few days."

Signe seemed to be thinking for a while, and then she said:

"Well, you must do what you think best." The priest was still considering what he had best do as he walked up and down, puffing away vigorously; suddenly he came to a halt.

"Will you go in to her, or shall I?" he said.

"It would be better if you went in, of course," answered the daughter with a loving look.

He was just going to turn the handle of the door, when a peal of laughter rang out from the room at the other side of it; then there was silence for a moment—then peal upon peal burst forth again. The priest, who had moved back a little, now hurried forward and his daughter after him; surely their strange guest must have suddenly fallen into hysterics.

When the door was opened they saw Petra sitting where she had flung herself down, with a book before her, over which she had dropped without being aware of it. Her tears had fallen over its leaves; she saw this and was trying to wipe them off, when her eye was caught by a vulgar expression which she had often enough heard at the time when she ran wild in the streets, but which she thought no book would ever have dared to print. In her amazement she forgot to weep, but sat staring at the book. Why what could all this mad stuff be! she read on with open mouth: it grew worse and worse; it was so coarse and yet so irresistibly funny, that she could not help going on reading. She read till she forgot all else; she read herself away from pain and grief, from time and place, with old Father Holberg; for of course it was his work! She burst out laughing, she began to roar with laughter—even now, when the priest and his daughter stood by her, she failed to see their grave faces or to remember what she had begged of them: but she went on laughing as she asked:

"What is this? what in the world can this be?" and turned to the title-page.

Then the colour left her cheeks as she looked up at them and down again at the well-known hand-writing. There are things which strike upon the heart like a rifle-shot;

things which we think we have fled hundreds of miles from, and find lying right in front of us—here on the first page stood written: "Hans Oedegaard."

"Is the book *his*?" cried Petra, all the blood burning up in her cheeks again, "Is *he* coming here?" she cried, getting up.

"He has promised to," answered Signe—and then Petra called to mind that there was a priest and his family in the Bergen diocese, with whom he had been when abroad; she had only been journeying in a circle then, and it had led her back to him.

"Is he coming soon, d'you think? or is he already here then?" and she got up at once as if to fly.

"No, indeed, for he's ill," said Signe.

"Ah, yes, of course! he's ill," repeated Petra sadly, and sank down again.

"But tell me," cried Signe," are not you the——"

"——Fisher-lassie?" said the priest, finishing the sentence.

"Yes," said Petra, looking up at them beseechingly, "Yes, I am the Fisher-lassie."

They knew her well enough here; for, indeed, Oedegaard used to talk of nothing else.

"That alters the case," said the priest: he felt that something must have gone amiss, and friendly help was needed; "remain here for the present."

Petra looked up and marked the look with which Signe thanked him; that was so sweet to her, that she went back, took both Signe's hands in hers—she dared go no further—and said with a deep blush, "I will tell you all as soon as as we two are alone."

An hour later Signe had heard all Petra's story and told it her father. By his advice she wrote that very day to Oedegaard and kept writing to him all the while Petra remained in the house.

When Petra that night lay down to rest in her big warm bed, in a comfortable room with the birch-wood crackling in the hearth and the New Testament between the two candles on the spotless table by the bed, she took the book into her hands and thanked her God for everything, yea, for evil as well as for good.

* * * * * * *

As a young man with an ardent spirit and natural powers of eloquence, Signe's father had made up his mind to become a clergyman; his parents, who were wealthy people, had been much against it; they would much rather have had him choose what they called an independent calling; but their opposition only increased the strength of his desire, and when he had finished his education at home, he went abroad to continue his studies. It happened during a preliminary sojourn in Denmark that he often met a young lady who belonged to a sect whose views were not so austere as his own, and which he was therefore much opposed to; consequently he was ever endeavouring to work upon her; but the way in which she looked at him and thus silenced him was never out of his mind during his stay abroad. As soon as he came back, he went and visited her. They were constantly together again, and each so grew in the other's favour, that they got engaged and shortly after were married. Now it became clear to them that they each had had a secret plan for the other; he had thought to draw her in her graceful womanhood into his sterner creed, and she had felt such child-like confidence in her power to bring his strength and his eloquence to the service of her community. The first very gentle attempt on his part was met by the same on hers; he drew back disappointed and mistrustful. She quickly enough perceived that, and from that day forth he went on his guard against attempts on her part, she against his. But neither of them ever made another; for both had

grown alarmed. He feared his own passionate nature; she lest by failure she should throw away her chance of winning him over; for the hope of so doing she never gave up,—it had become the end and aim of her life. But the contest never came; for, in her presence, strife was not possible. But his active temperament and hardly-restrained passions were bound to find some outlet, and this they did each time he went up into the pulpit and saw her sitting beneath him. His congregation was drawn in with him into a lasting whirlpool, and as he made them feel his excitement, so they in turn made him feel theirs. She saw this and bade her fearful heart find ease in kindly acts, and in her daughter, when after a while she became a mother; her she took in her bodily and spiritual embrace and bore her away to be the companion of her solitude. On the child's innocence she bestowed her own dear hopes; from her, received them back; in her, nurtured them; with her she held love's banquet, and came back from it to him, the strong, stern man, with the double sweetness of womanhood and Christianity upon her, so that it was not possible for him to say anything that might trouble her. He could not help loving her more than the whole world beside, and the more tenderly he loved her, the more his whole soul was permeated with the yearning to help her to her eternal salvation. Quietly the mother's right withdrew the child from his religious instruction, so that the child's songs, the child's questionings were but a fresh source of pain to him; but when he was stung up in the pulpit to bitter and violent excitement, his housemate only welcomed him home again with somewhat more gentleness than usual; her eyes indeed spoke, but her mouth uttered never a word. And his little daughter clung on to his hands and looked up at him with her mother's eyes.

Of all things they talked in this household, save of the one thing that lay at the bottom of all their thoughts

But tension such as this could not endure very long. The mother continued to smile, it is true, but only because she did not dare to let herself weep. When the time came for the daughter to be prepared for Confirmation, and it was his turn now, by right of his office, to take charge of her religious instruction, which till now the mother, by right of hers, had done, the strain reached its utmost; and after the sermon to the candidates for confirmation, and the reading out of their names, the mother became ill much as other people get tired. She smiled as she said that now she could no longer walk, and some days later, smiling as before, she told them she could no longer sit up. She liked to have her daughter constantly by her; though she could no longer talk to her, she could at least see her. And the daughter knew what the mother liked best. She read to her from the Book of Life, and sang to her the hymns of her childhood, the new, quickening psalms of her community. It was long before the priest fully grasped what was about to happen; but when he *did*, all other thoughts left him save one—let her but speak to him, if only a word or two; but she could not; she was no longer able to talk. He stood at the foot of the bed, looking at her and praying to God. She smiled at him and he fell on his knees and, taking his daughter's hand, placed it in hers, as if to say: "Here, keep her; she shall be thine for ever!" Then she smiled as she never had before—and in that smile her soul fled.

It was long before the priest could be got to talk again; another was appointed to look after his flock, and he himself went about from place to place, from room to room, as if seeking something. He walked softly; when he spoke, it was in a subdued tone; and it was only by dropping into all his quiet ways that his daughter was gradually able to become the companion of his heart. Now she began to help him in his search: every word of the

mother was called up again, and "what *she* would have wished" became henceforth the standard of his life. The daughter's constant intercourse with her—to which he had remained a stranger—became now for the first time his life too. From the earliest times that she could remember as a child, everything was gone over again; her hymns were sung, her prayers prayed, the sermons she had most loved read over one after another, and her comments and explanations of them deeply pondered.

Thus actively employed again, the desire came upon him to go to the spot where first he had met her, and try to follow in her footsteps the path she had trodden. Himself a beginner in this new life, his senses were open to all the beginnings around him—the great national, the lesser political ones—and these brought back to him his own young vigour. His strength, and with it his desire, came flooding back on him; but now he was burning to proclaim the Word, so that it might fit men for Life and not alone for Death.

Before shutting himself up again in his parish among the mountains with his great work, he yearned to take a wider survey of all without him. So they travelled far and wide and now rested at home again, full of memories of great things.

Such were they among whom Petra now lived.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SMOKE, FIRE AND SNOW.

IN the third year of her stay, one Friday a few days before Christmas, the two girls were sitting together in the evening twilight; the priest had just come in with his pipe. The day had gone by like most of the others in these last two years; it had been begun with a walk, then breakfast, and after that an hour's singing and playing, followed by language lessons or other studies and occupations about the house. In the afternoon each went to her own room. Signe happened that particular day to have been writing to Oedegaard, after whom Petra never enquired; nor, indeed, could she bear any reference to past times. Towards evening they went for a sledge-ride, and then came back to talk together, to sing, and later to read aloud. To this the priest always came in: he read remarkably well, and his daughter not less so. Petra learnt both their manners of reading, paying particular attention to the way they spoke. Signe's voice and accent had such a charm for her that it seemed to echo in her ears when she was by herself; but Petra had such a high esteem for Signe, that a man would have considered her madly in love with himself for a quarter as much: indeed, she often made Signe blush. Either the priest or Signe was in the

habit of reading aloud every evening (for Petra could not be prevailed upon to read), and they had thus gone through all the masterpieces of Norse literature and were gradually working their way into those of other lands, reading for preference dramatic poetry. Just as they were about to light the lamps to begin that evening, a girl came in from the kitchen and said that there was a man outside with a message for Petra. It turned out to be a seaman from her native place. Her mother had made him promise to visit her when he went to those parts; he had walked a matter of seven miles and had to start off again at once, as the ship would soon be sailing. Petra went part of the way too; she wanted to have some further talk with him, as he was a reliable man and she had known him before.

The evening was somewhat dark: there was no light in the farmstead nor in any of the windows, except in the laundry, where they were busy washing; nor was there any light along the road, and the way was scarce visible until the moon had struggled over the mountain-tops. But she walked along through the forest fearlessly, spite of the ugly-looking shadows among the firs. One piece of news in especial had made her want to walk along with the seaman. He had told her that Pedro Ohlsen's mother was dead, and that Pedro himself had sold the house and moved up to Gunlaug's, where he lived in Petra's room. This had come about nearly two years before, but her mother had never said a word of it. Now Petra could guess who it was that wrote her mother's letters, a question she had often asked her without ever getting any answer; but every letter always ended with these words: "and a greeting from him who writes this." The seaman had been bidden to ask how long she meant to stay at the parsonage, and what she meant to do afterwards? To the first of these questions, Petra answered that she did not know; to the second, that he was to say to her mother

there was but one thing in the world she wished to be, and if she could not be that, she would be miserable all her life; but for the present she might not say what that was.

While Petra was walking along with the sailor and talking to him, the priest and Signe remained in the sitting-room talking of her, in whom they both had such joy. The farm-bailiff came in in the middle and, after giving his account of the day's doings, asked whether either of them knew that the strange young lady was in the habit of going up and down from her room at night by a rope-ladder? He had to repeat it three times, for neither of them understood what he meant; he might just as well have been saying that she was in the habit of going up and down on the rays of the moon. The room was all dark, and there was not a sound in it: even the priest's pipe was inaudible. At last he was forced to speak, and in a heavy voice he asked:

"Who saw her?"

"I myself did. I was up yonder looking after the horses; it might have been about one o'clock."

"She went down on a rope-ladder, you say?"

"And up again."

There was another long pause. Petra's room was in the upper part of the house, in a corner that looked out on the lane. She was the only person up there, for nobody else had a room in that part of the building; there could therefore be no mistake.

"She must have walked in her sleep," said the man, turning to go.

"But she cannot have made a rope-ladder in her sleep," said the priest.

"No, that's what I thought; so I thought it was best to tell you about it, sir. I have said nothing to anyone else."

"Has anyone but you seen it?"

"No—but if you doubt me, sir, the rope-ladder will be a proof; if that's not up there, my eyes must have seen false."

Up rose the priest at once.

"Father!" cried Signe.

"Bring the light!" answered the priest, in a tone that admitted no resistance.

"Father!" cried Signe, once more, as she lit the candle herself and handed it to him.

"Yes, I'm her father, as well as yours, so long as she's in my house; it's my duty to look after her."

The priest walked first with the light, Signe and the bailiff following. Everything in the little room was in order, save that on the table by the bed lay a heap of books, one open on the top of another.

"Does she read at night?"

"I don't know; but she never puts out her light *before* one o'clock."

Signe and her father looked at one another. All separated for the night at the parsonage between ten and half-past, and they met again in the morning between six and seven.

"Do you know anything of this?" asked the father.

Signe made no reply, but the bailiff, who was on his knees groping about in a corner of the room, answered from where he knelt:

"Anyway, she's not alone."

"What's that you're saying?"

"There's always some one with her talking to her; sometimes they talk very loud, for I've heard her both begging and threatening. She's in somebody's power, you may be sure, poor creature!"

Signe turned away, and the priest was pale as death.

"And here's the ladder," continued the man, as he drew it forth and held it up.

Two clothes-lines had been put side by side and a third tied to one of them, passed over the other and knotted, then knotted to the other half an ell lower down, and so on till they formed a perfect ladder. They examined it closely.

"Was she long away?" asked the priest.

"Away? How d'you mean?" said the bailiff.

"Was she long gone, when she had got down?"

Signe stood trembling with cold and fright.

"She did not go away at all; she went down and up again."

"Up again! Who was it went away, then?"

Signe made a sudden movement and burst out weeping.

"There could not have been anyone with her when I saw her yesterday evening."

"There was no one on the ladder you say, but her?"

"No."

"And she went down and then up again?"

"Yes."

"She must have wanted to try it," said the priest, and breathed a little more freely.

"Before she let anyone else use it," added the bailiff.

"You think, then," said the priest, looking at him, "this is not the first she has made?"

"No; else how could she have had people up there with her?"

"Have you known long that she had anyone with her?"

"Not before this winter, when she began to use lights; it never struck me to come down here before."

"What!" said the priest sternly, "you have known of this the whole winter? Why, then, did you not speak of it sooner?"

"I thought that it must have been some one of the household who was with her; it was only when I saw her yesterday night on the ladder that I suspected it to be

somebody else. Of course if I had thought of that sooner, I would have told you of it sooner."

"Yes, yes; it's evident enough she has deceived us all!"

Signe looked up at him entreatingly.

"She ought not to be so far off from all the rest of the household, perhaps," put in the bailiff as he rolled up the ladder.

"She ought not to be in this house at all after this," said the priest, and he turned to go, the others following; but when he had come down and put the lamp on the table, Signe came and flung herself into his arms.

"Yes—yes, my child," was all he could say to her, "this is a grievous disappointment."

A little later, as Signe was sitting in the corner of the sofa with a handkerchief before her eyes, and the priest was walking restlessly up and down, pipe in hand, they heard noisy screams from the kitchen, quick steps on the stairs, and the sounds of hurry and confusion in the passage overhead. They both hastened out. Petra's room was on fire! A spark from their candle must have fallen into the corner—for it was from that direction the fire came—and in an instant set fire to the hangings. The woodwork of the window was just on the point of catching fire, when a passer-by saw the flames from the road and rushed in and told the people at work in the laundry. The fire was soon put out; but in the country, where everything goes its even way—year in, year out—it needs but a slight excitement to arouse people's minds. Fire, their greatest and most terrible foe, is never out of their thoughts, so that when it does thrust up its head from the depths below, licking its lips as it hisses and roars for its prey, they fall into trembling fear and have no peace for weeks; indeed some of them never rest quietly again.

When the priest and his daughter were together again

in the sitting-room and had lit the lamps, both felt it as a sort of discomforting omen that Petra's room should thus have been straightway annihilated and every token and reminder of her burnt up. At that moment they heard Petra's clear voice questioning and exclaiming. She darted up and down the stairs, ran from bedroom to passage, from passage to kitchen. and then came dashing in to the sitting-room, still in her outdoor clothes.

"Goodness gracious!" she cried, "my room's been burnt out!"

Nobody answered but, without a pause, she ran on:

"Who's been up here? When did it happen? How did the fire come about?"

To this the priest replied that it was he who had been up there; they had been looking for something—and so saying, he eyed her narrowly. Petra did not show the least sign of astonishment, and still less did she show any fear of what they might have seen. It gave her no misgivings that Signe did not look up from her sofa-corner; she thought that merely arose from the shock the fire had been to her, and went on asking how it was discovered, how put out, who had been there first—and, not getting quick enough answers to all her questions, rushed out again as she had entered. She came dashing in again with her walking things half off, half on, and told the priest and Signe all that had happened, and how she herself had seen the flames and ran on in great terror, but was glad now to find that it was no worse. As she spoke, she took off the rest of her outdoor things, took it out of the room and, coming back, took a seat by the table, never leaving off telling them what this one had said, that one done, etc.; the whole place was turned upside down, and this she seemed to find very amusing. As the others still continued silent, she bewailed that the fire had spoilt the evening for them all; for she so enjoyed what they had

been lately reading aloud—"Romeo and Juliet"—that she had meant to ask Signe that very evening to read to her again the scene she thought most beautiful of all, viz., Romeo's parting from Juliet on the balcony.

In the midst of her flood of talk, came in one of the maids from the wash-house and said that they were in want of clothes-lines; there was a bundle of them missing.

Petra turned suddenly fiery red, and started up, crying "I know where they are, I'll go and get them;" but before she had got far she remembered the fire, paused, and said, amidst her blushes, "Goodness gracious, they are sure to have been burned; they were in my room!"

Signe had turned towards her, the priest was eyeing her with his piercing side-long glance.

"What did you want clothes-lines for?" he asked, and his breath came so quick and short that he could scarce get out the words.

As Petra looked at him, his terrible earnestness made her half afraid for one instant, and the next half-tempted her to burst out laughing. She struggled against this impulse for a moment, but as her eyes fell on him again, such a peal of laughter rang out from the depths of her heart that it was useless for her to try and check it; but there was no more sign of a guilty conscience in her laughter than there is in that of a rippling brook. Signe could hear that from the sound of her voice, and sprang up from the sofa, crying out:

"What is it all? what is it?"

Petra turned, laughed, dashed away, ducked her head down and made for the door. But Signe had planted herself in the way, still crying out, "What is it all about? Tell me, Petra dear."

Petra hid her face on Signe's breast, as if to prevent herself being seen, but still went on laughing without stopping.

Now guilt does not behave thus, and the priest himself

could not fail to see this. He, who was gathering himself up but a moment before to tower aloft in indignant anger, slipped down instead into merry laughter, drawing Signe along with him, for nothing in the world is more catching than laughter, especially laughter for which there seems to be no reason. The vain attempts that the priest and Signe kept making to find out what they were laughing at, only added to the fulness of their mirth; the maid-servant, who was in the room waiting for her answer, could at last hold out no longer, but burst forth into a loud guffaw; she had a big, coarse laugh that she felt to be out of keeping with such fine folks and furniture, so she hastened to the door and gave full swing to her merriment in the kitchen. Of course she carried the contagion with her there, and straightway a perfect storm of laughter burst in upon them from the kitchen, where they knew even less than the others what there was to laugh at, and this set them off laughing again in the parlour.

When, at length, they were nearly worn out with laughing, Signe made a last attempt to find out the cause of it.

"Come now, you *shall* tell me!" she cried, as she held Petra's hands tightly.

"No, no—not for anything in the world!"

"O yes, you shall! You see, I know already what it is!" cried the other.

Petra looked at her and burst out laughing again; but Signe went on:

"Father knows too!"

This time Petra did not laugh, she actually yelled with merriment; she tore herself from Signe's grasp, and made for the door, but Signe got hold of her again. Petra turned round to try and wrest herself free, for get away she would and must at any price, She kept on laughing during her struggles, but there were tears in her eyes

now. Then Signe let her go—out dashed Petra—and after her, Signe: both of them darted into Signe's room.

There Signe threw her arms round Petra's neck, and Petra clasped her closely.

"Goodness gracious! do you both know it?" she whispered.

"Yes; we went up there with the bailiff: he had seen you—and we found the rope-ladder!"

There was another scream from Petra and another attempt at flight, but this time only as far as the corner of the sofa, where she hid her face in the cushion while Signe, leaning over her, whispered into her ear all about their voyage of discovery and its burning consequences. What had cost her but a short while before so many tears and so much anxiety, seemed now such a merry matter that she told the story very humorously. Petra alternately listened and stopped her ears; looked up and hid her face again. When Signe had done, and both of them were sitting there in the darkness, Petra whispered:

"Do you know, Signe, what it all means? I can't possibly manage to get to sleep when we go to our rooms at ten o'clock, for whatever we happen to have been reading always makes too much impression on me for that: so I learn by heart all that I like best in it. In this way I have learnt whole scenes, and I say them aloud when I'm alone. When we came to 'Romeo and Juliet' I thought it the finest thing ever written; it made me crazy and wild, and I felt I *must* try the rope-ladder. I had never imagined before that one could go up and down on such a thing; so I got hold of some ropes—and that scamp of a bailiff must have been down below at the time and seen me!—O, its nothing to laugh at, Signe! it's so tom-boyish! I shall never be anything but a tom-boy, Signe—and now, of course, I shall be the talk of the whole place to-morrow!"

But Signe, who had burst out laughing again, fell upon her with kisses and caresses, and rushed out of the room, screaming:

"Father must know of this; father must be told!"

"Are you mad, Signe?" cried Petra, and the one dashed off after the other so that they came flying into the room as they had flown out of it.

They almost knocked over the priest, who was just about to come and see what had become of them. Signe began her story, and Petra darted out again; but the moment she got outside the door she felt that she ought to have stopped in the room, just to hinder Signe telling. She tried to get in again, but the priest held the door fast, and it was no good her trying to move it, so she thumped on it with both hands from the outside, yelled and stamped on the floor to drown Signe's voice, who only talked all the louder for it. Not till the priest had heard the whole story, and was laughing as loudly and merrily as Signe at the new method of studying the classics, did he open the door; but then Petra scudded off.

After supper, at which Petra was present and had been properly teased by the priest, she was made to recite, by way of punishment, what she had learnt by heart. She shewed them that she really did know all the best scenes she had heard read, and not single parts alone, but all in the piece. She gave them forth, much as they read them aloud; at times her enthusiasm seemed about to blaze forth, but she quickly smothered it. As soon as the priest observed this, he bade her put more feeling into it; but she only drew back the more. She went on and on, and they kept on at it for hours; she knew the comic scenes as well as she knew the tragic, the mirthful ones as well as the serious. Her memory both astonished and amused them; she laughed, too, as she bade them only try.

"I could wish that the poor actors had but an eighth part of your powers, dear," said Signe.

"God keep her from ever taking to acting," said the priest with a sudden deep earnestness.

"Why, father; surely you don't think that our Petra could ever dream of such a thing?" said Signe, laughing.

"I only spoke of it because I have always noticed that a person who has been acquainted with the poetry of his own land from early youth has never any wish to go on the stage, while one who knows very little of poetry until he has grown up often yearns to do so. It is a longing, suddenly stirred up, that leads them astray."

"That is very true. A really cultivated person seldom goes on to the stage."

"And still seldomer a person with a real feeling for poetry?"

"Yes, and when he does it is generally due to some fault in his character which lets vanity and frivolity get the upper hand of him. Both in my student years and when I was on my travels I got to know a good many actors, but I have never known, nor met any one who knew, one that led a really Christian life. I have come across some who felt drawn towards it, it is true; but there is something so exciting and turbulent in their work that they never seem able to quietly collect their thoughts, even long after they have left off. When I have talked with them about it, they have themselves admitted it and bewailed it. 'But then,' they have always added, 'we must console ourselves with the thought that we are not worse than a good many others.' But that I call a pitiable consolation, and a calling which can in nowise be made to help us to the Christian's life—a sinful calling. God help them, and keep all that are pure in heart from it!"

Next day—Saturday—ths priest was, as usual, up before seven o'clock. He strolled round among his labourers,

struck out a bit beyond the farm, and came home again at daybreak. Just as he was going by the house into the yard, his eye fell on an open copy-book, or something of the sort, which had most likely been thrown out of Petra's window the evening before, and not been seen again owing to its being of the same colour as the snow. He picked up the book and took it in with him to his study; as he spread it out to dry it, he saw that it was an old French exercise-book, in which verses had since been written. He was not thinking of looking at the verses, when his eye was caught by the word "actress" written up and down, along and across, in corners and down whole pages—he could see the word even among the verses. He sat down and looked into the thing more closely. There was one set of verses which had been altered and corrected time upon time, and which even in the last version stood full of corrections, but was at any rate legible:

"One thing, dear book, I'll trust to thee,
'Tis the one thing I mean to be:
An actress; it shall be my part,
To show the world a woman's heart.
Why she weeps and why she smiles,
All her joy and all her strife,
All her truth and all her wiles,
Every passion of her life.
God on high I kneel to thee:
Grant me this one thing to be."

A little further on there stood written:

"Can I not thus, Lord, do Thy will?
Can I not be Thy servant still?"

A little further on some lines, evidently suggested by a poem they had read together some months before:

"O I would that I were an Elfin fair,
An Elfin fair;

I'd ride upon moonbeams and sport in the air,
Sport in the air!
And flit to and fro at my own sweet will,
My own sweet will;
And all who dared spy at me quickly I'd kill,
Quickly I'd kill.
—— —— no, that would be wicked, tho'—lirum,
Lirum, la!"

There came many scratched-out lines, corrections, sketches, notes, and then:

"Tra, la, la—wouldn't it be fun
To dance with all alike and never care for one?
Tra, la, la—wouldn't it be fun
To have them all come after me while I would favour none?"

Then came a letter in neat, clear handwriting:

"Dearest Heinrich,

"Don't you think that you and I are the cleverest of the whole lot? This will be the cause of a good deal of trouble to us both, but what does that matter? I permit you to have the honour of taking me to the masquerade to-morrow evening; I have never yet been there, you must know, and I long for some real mad trick or another, for everything in this house is so terribly quiet and dreary.

"You are a sad scamp, Heinrich. What are you up to now, I wonder? Here sit I,

"Your own
"Pernille."

The last thing that the priest read was some verses written again and again in plain, clear writing; she had evidently copied them from some book, and had wanted to learn them by heart:—

"Mighty thoughts my heart are filling,
Feeling high my bosom thrilling;
Thoughts far greater than my strength,
Feelings more than I can bear;
O my Saviour, come at length,
Thou who conqueredst pain and care,

Help me, Christ, my thoughts to tell,
Draw them from their silent well;
Lord, in pity help thou me,
Loki bind, set Balder free."

Many other things were written in the book, but the priest read no farther.

So it was to be a play-actress that this girl had come into his house and got his daughter to teach her. This was the secret purpose for which she listened to them with such eagerness every night as they read aloud; this was why she learnt it all off by heart, was it? She had been tricking them the whole while, and even yesterday, when she made believe to explain everything, there was something she was hiding from them; even whilst she was laughing her merriest, she was lying.

And that secret purpose of hers! That career which the priest had so often condemned in her hearing, *she* dared to adorn with the title of God's Call to her and to ask him to bless it. A life full of outward shows and vanities, deceitfulness and passionate excesses, idleness and sensuality, lying and instability: a life over which hovered birds of prey as over carrion—was this the life which she yearned to devote herself to, and besought God to hallow? was this the life to which the priest and his daughter were destined to help her, there in that peaceful parsonage, under the stern watchful eye of that God-fearing fellowship of Christian folk?

When Signe came in, fresh and bright as the winter morning, to wish her father good morning, she found his study full of smoke. This was always a sign of his being in perplexity, but it was doubly so when it happened at such an early hour. He said not a word to her but he handed her the book. At once she saw that it was Petra's; the recollection of yesterday evening's suspicion and grief came over her; she dared not look inside it, and her heart

beat so violently, that she was forced to sit down. But the same word that had first caught her father's notice, met her eye too; she could not help looking further into the book and reading on. Her first feeling was one of shame—not shame for Petra, but shame at the thought that her father should have been forced to see this. But it was not long before she felt the deep humiliation that comes of finding oneself deceived by those one loves. For a moment it seems as if they have been cleverer, sharper, more dexterous than we, and a veil of mysterious power seems to wrap them round. But presently the soul begins to glow with indignant wrath; honour wields its sway over powers which are not mysterious, though unseen; we feel we are strong enough to shatter at a blow a hundred such petty tricks of cunning; what but a moment before humiliated us, we now despise.

Petra was at the piano in the sitting-room, and her voice broke in upon them as she sang:

"O Life it is joy, for the Sun-king has shone,
And the doubt-clouds of darkness are scattered and gone,
And the hills are a-blaze
With the Sun's bright rays,
And 'Up, up, up,' cries the bird in the grove,
And 'Up, up, up,' cries my love—
'Up, up with Hope and the Sun.'"

Then suddenly tumultuous music swelled forth from the piano, and out burst Petra's song again:

"Thanks, friend, for the warning words you say,
Yet across yon sea will I seek my way,
Though the winds may howl and the breakers roar,
Though I never again should come back to the shore;
For this is the chief of pleasures to me,
To drive my keel through an unknown sea;
To feel the waves dash over my prow,
As I try how fast and how far I can go."

This was more than the priest could bear; he rushed past

Signe, tearing the book out of her hand as he did so, and dashed to the door; nor did his daughter try to stop him this time. He came in upon Petra at full speed, threw the book on the piano before her, turned round, paced hurriedly round the room, and came back again to her: she had risen, and was holding the book clasped to her breast as she looked around on all sides in wild amazement. He stopped in front of her, meaning to tell her all he thought; but his wrath at having been used as a tool for more than two years by this wily girl, and especially at the thought of his warm-hearted, self-sacrificing daughter having been tricked so, was so mighty in his heart, that he could not at first find words, and when he did, he himself felt that they were too bitter. Once more he paced wildly round the room, stood before her again with a face red with passion, and then, without a single word, turned his back on her and went into his study. When he got there he found Signe gone.

All that day, each of them remained in her own room. The priest had his mid-day meal by himself, as neither of the girls came in. Petra was in the house-keeper's room which had been allotted to her, after the fire in her own: everywhere and in vain she had sought for Signe, to explain; but Signe must surely be away from the parsonage.

Petra felt that she was on the verge of a decisive step. Her life's most secret thoughts had been torn from her heart, and now an influence would be brought to bear upon her which she could not endure. She herself best knew that, if she were to give up her purpose, she would ever drift before the winds of chance. As it was, she could be light-hearted with the light-hearted, trustful with those that trusted her, and in all things steadfast and secure; but this was all in the strength of her secret purpose,—her purpose to one day reach the mark to which all her powers were growing and prompting her. Should she make a

confidant of anyone after her first futile attempt at Bergen? —no, that she could not do—not even if Oedegaard had been there. She must cherish her resolve in secret, until her powers were so far developed that she could endure people's doubts in the matter.

But now all was suddenly changed. The priest's fiery face was ever present to her frightened conscience—she must find some means of escape! She kept hunting for Signe with more and more feverish excitement; but it was already afternoon, and no Signe was to be found. Now, the longer a person for whom we are looking keeps out of our way, the more stress we lay on the cause of our separation, and thus it came about that Petra at last began to consider that she had been guilty of terrible treachery to Signe in using her friendship to help her on to what Signe herself considered a very sinful thing. The all-knowing God could be her witness that that view of the matter had never before occurred to her, but now indeed she felt that she was a great sinner.

Just as once before in her own home, so now she felt herself overwhelmed by a thing of which the moment before she had not had a shadow of anxiety! That such a terrible thing could come upon her again, and that she had not even now got a step further on the right road, increased her former feeling of doubtful fear to absolute terror, and she saw before her nothing but a future of unhappiness. But in proportion as her own feeling of sinfulness grew, so did the image of Signe's own pure-hearted and loving self-sacrifice. Truly Signe had heaped coals of fire upon her: let her then cast herself at Signe's feet, cry to her and pray to her, and never leave off clinging to her and beseeching her, till she had given her just one loving, friendly look.

It had grown dark; Signe must be home again now, wherever she had been. Petra ran down the passage and

into the wing of the building where Signe's room was; the door was locked—a sign that she was inside. Petra's heart beat fast as she took hold of the handle again, and cried in a voice of entreaty:

"Signe, let me come and talk to you! Signe, I can't bear this any longer!"

Not a sound from the room. Petra bent down, listened, and knocked again:

"Signe, O Signe! you don't know how miserable I am!"

No answer. Petra listened long, but no sound came from within. If we get no reply at such times, we are apt to grow doubtful whether there is anyone to answer, even if we know that there must be; and if it is dark, we grow anxious and frightened as well.

"Signe, Signe! If you are there, have pity on me—answer me! Signe!"

Still all was silence, and Petra began to shiver and tremble. The kitchen door opened, letting out a broad, clear stream of light, and from the yard came the sound of light-hearted, merry footsteps. This put a thought into Petra's head: she would herself go into the yard, climb up on the ledge that ran along the stone wall which formed the lower part of the side of the wing of the building, go all round the house on this ledge till she got to the other side where it was very high, and thus look into Signe's room!

It was a bright starry night, and the mountain and the houses stood out in sharp clear outlines; but, save outlines, nothing was to be seen. The snow shone white, and the black foot-paths here and there served only to set off its radiant purity; from the road came the sound of sleigh-bells. The light and the sounds inspirited her, and she sprang up on to the ledge. She tried to hold tight to the projecting timber-work above, but she over-balanced herself, and fell down again. She took an empty barrel and

rolled it up to the wall, got up on to it, and from it to the ledge. Then she worked along hands and feet together, moving them about six inches at a time. It needed a strong hand with strong fingers to hold on tight, and she could not get a proper grasp of the wood-work, because it was barely an inch broad. She was afraid someone might see her; for, if so, they would of course put it down as having something to do with the affair of the rope-ladder. If only she could get away from the side facing the yard, and reach the cross-wall! But when at last she managed to do so, there was a new peril to be faced: there was nothing in front of the windows, and she had to bend down as she passed each one, always in fear of falling off. On the long wall the height was considerable, and all along it below there ran a hedge of gooseberry bushes, upon which she would certainly fall if she slipped; but she went on undaunted.

Her fingers were throbbing, her limbs trembling, she shivered all over her body, but still she went on. Only a few steps more now, and she would be at Signe's window. There was no light burning in the room, and the blind was not down; the moon shone in such a way that Petra would be able to see every corner. This gave her new courage. She was now close to the window-sill, and seizing it with her whole hand, she paused to rest; for now that she had reached her goal, her heart began to beat so violently that she could scarcely breathe. But the longer she waited the worse it grew, so she hastened on, and stood suddenly in front of the window-pane.

There was a piercing cry from within. Signe, who had been sitting in a corner of the sofa, sprang into the middle of the room, and, with both hands and wild gestures of abhorrence striving to keep off the terrible apparition at her window, rushed off in affright.

Petra realized in a moment what her figure against the

panes in the clear light of the moon,—her heedless, horrid boldness, her excited face all ablaze with the moon's rays,—must have brought about. She saw that her luckless idea alone was quite enough to have frightened anyone, and that henceforth the sight of her would probably be always a terror to Signe. Consciousness left her, and, with a thrilling shriek, she fell.

At Signe's cry of terror all the people in the house had come running out, but they had found nothing. The second shriek set everybody about the place searching and talking loudly, but still without result: it was pure chance that the priest happened to look out of Signe's window, and saw in the moonshine Petra lying wedged in among the bushes. A great fear fell upon them all, and it was not easy for them to get her free and lift her up. She was taken up to Signe's room—because the house-keeper's was cold—undressed, and put to bed; then some set about bathing her hands and neck, which were badly torn by the brambles, while others made the room comfortable, cheerful, and warm. When she had quite come to, and looked around her, she begged them to leave her alone.

The quiet cheerfulness of the room, the delicate whiteness of the windows, the toilet table, the bed, and the chairs, brought back Signe vividly to her mind. She thought of her pure, loving heart; her gentle voice, through which spoke her stainless soul; her fine feeling for the thoughts of others; her soft, sweet kindliness. From all this she had barred herself out, she felt: soon she would have to leave this room; soon, too, the parsonage itself. And where was she to go then?

One is not taken up from the high-ways three times in one's life, and even if that could be so, she would have no more of it; it could only end, it seemed to her, in the same way. No one would ever be able to have faith in her: whatever the reason for it might be, she felt, at any

rate, it was so. She had not got one step further, and she never would; for unless people trusted her she could not. Ah! how she prayed, how she wept! In the anguish of her soul she writhed and flung herself about, until at last she fell asleep from pure weariness.

As she slept everything about her seemed to grow white and high. Never had she seen anything so towering high as this, nor such a radiant whiteness,—as if a million stars were shining down on her.

## CHAPTER X.

### A DAY OF ENLIGHTENING.

WHEN she awoke, she was still up in the clouds; the thoughts that came streaming in on her with the daylight strove to come up there too, but were straightway taken captive and borne away by something with which the whole air was filled—the sound of the bells for Sabbath service. She sprang out of bed and put on her clothes, ate a little food in the pantry, wrapped herself up warmly and hurried away—never in her life before had she so thirsted for the Word of God as now she did! By the time she reached the church, service had just begun and the door was closed: it was a cold day, and her fingers glowed as she took hold of the door-handle and turned it. The priest was standing right in front of the altar, so she stood waiting by the door till he had finished and the acolyte was about to remove the chasuble; then she made her way into what was known as the "Bishop's pew," a pew standing in the choir with curtains in front of it. The proper pew for the priest's family was up in the gallery; but if anyone had reason for wishing to sit unseen and alone, the Bishop's pew was resorted to. When Petra reached it and crept in, she saw Signe already seated there in its further corner. She took one step out again, but

just at that moment the priest turned to go past her from the altar to the vestry; she quickly retreated into the pew again, and sat down as far off Signe as she possibly could, for Signe had let her veil down, and that grieved Petra sorely. She looked out at the congregation as they sat wedged in in the high wooden pews, the men on the right, and on the left the women; their breath formed a waving cloud above them; on the windows the ice was an inch thick: the clumsy images of carved wood, the heavy, draggling singing, the thickly-wrapped-up folks sitting there, all seemed to match one another and to be hard and distant from her: the impression that the look of the country round Bergen had made on her, the afternoon that she left it, came back to her mind; here once more she was only a fear-stricken wayfarer.

The priest was now standing in the pulpit, and in *his* eyes, too, there was a look of sternness. "Lead us not into temptation!" he prayed, "for we know that the talents Thou hast given us may each lead us astray." He prayed that God would be merciful and not try us above our strength; and that we might never forget to pray for His grace; for only by humbling our faculties at His feet, could they be made to help us towards salvation. In his sermon he enlarged on the same subject, dwelling on the double task our talents brought with them: firstly, that of doing our duty each in that state of life in which our faculties and circumstances have placed us; secondly, that of developing in us and in those intrusted to our care the ideal of the Christian man. We must be very careful, he went on, in making choice of our life's work; for alas! there are certain callings which, of themselves, are sinful: others there are which may become so to us, either because they are not fitting for us, or are only too well fitted to minister to our sinful desires. And moreover, just as certain as it was that each must try and make choice

according to his powers, so certain was it that a choice which of itself was neither unrighteous nor evil, might nevertheless lead us into temptation if we allowed it to swallow up all our time and all our thoughts. Our duties as Christians, he said, must no more be neglected than our duties as parents towards our children. We must be able so to collect our thoughts that the Holy Spirit might ever find room to perform its work within our hearts; we must be able to implant and protect the good seed of the love of Christ in our children. There could be no work, no excuse, which could release us from that duty, whatever our circumstances might be.

And now he went deeper into the matter—he explored the life-work of those who sat before him, their household, their place in life, and their thoughts. From other careers and mightier callings he drew forth such illustrations as might cast light on their own. The priest was a new man to those who only knew him in daily life, from the moment he warmed up to his subject in the pulpit. Even his outward appearance was altered: his stern, compressed face seemed to grow open and radiant with the thoughts that shone through it; his eyes dilated and looked straight and steadfastly before him, as if announcing great tidings; his rough, shaggy hair looked like the mane of a lion; his voice rolled forth in thunderous bursts, or cut sharp and keen with short, quick phrases,—at times falling to a quiet whisper, and then rising again with greater power. He was indeed quite unable to speak well except in a large place and with his thoughts fixed on the Eternal; for there was no music in his voice, save when he spoke with all his strength; nor was his face expressive, or his thoughts incisive and clear, save when all ablaze with deep feeling. Not that he came to his subject for the first time when in the pulpit; for sorrow and contemplation alike had filled his soul with great store, and he was, in addition, a close

and diligent student. But he was not always fit for the daily affairs of life and able to coin his thoughts into conventional talk. He needed to do all the talking, or at least to pace up and down the floor while it was going on. To begin a discussion with him was much like attacking a weaponless man, but all the same it was not without its perils; for the violence of his convictions was such as to leave little time for argument. Were he pressed to give his reasons, one of two things was the result: either he overwhelmed his antagonist with such vehemence of expression that there was always danger of a quarrel, or else he suddenly became dumb, fearing his own passionate nature. No one could be more easily put to silence than this strong, eloquent man.

Petra had begun to trĕmble as soon as the priest began his prayer, for she knew his reason for selecting those words. The longer he went on, the nearer she felt him coming to her own case. She shrank up into her corner, and she saw that Signe was doing the same. But with pitiless strength he hewed his way through—the Lion was out after his prey. She felt herself pursued everywhere, penned in and at his mercy; but what was seized with so mighty a grasp was held gently in the hand of mercy. It was as if, without one word of condemnation, she were laid on the bosom of the All-loving One. In that haven she wept and prayed; and when she heard Signe, too, weeping and praying, she loved her for it!

The priest came down from the teacher's seat and went past them into the vestry, his face glowing with radiant splendour that came from communion with the Most High. His eye fell searchingly and frankly on Petra; and as she looked up at him with trustful, candid eyes, a gleam of gentle kindness lighted up his face: he gave a quick glance at his daughter in her corner and passed on.

Presently Signe rose, but her veil was down, and Petra

did not dare to join her, so she waited a little before going; but at dinner that day all three sat together again. The priest talked a little, but Signe was reserved and silent. He evidently wished to say something about what had taken place; but as soon as he made the slightest approach to it, Signe turned the conversation so delicately, yet with such modest shyness, that the priest could not help being reminded of her mother;—this made him first silent and then sad, for so very little was needed to do that.

Now nothing is more dreary than an attempt at reconciliation that has turned out a failure. They rose from the table without being able even to look at one another or exchange the salutations customary after a meal. In the sitting-room, the situation at last became so oppressive, that each of them would have been glad to get away from it, but none of them liked to be the first to go; Petra, for her part, feeling that if she went now, it must even be never to return. She could not look upon Signe again, if she were not to be allowed to love her; she could not bear seeing the priest made sorrowful because of her. But if she must go, she must go, she felt, without bidding them farewell; for how *could* she say farewell to them? The mere thought of it moved her so, that she had scarcely strength enough to control her emotion.

Every minute that prolongs such a strained situation, when each is waiting for the other to do something, makes it more and more unbearable. One dares not move, for fear it should be noticed; every breath is heard, nor can one remain quite still without its being perceived, and seeming like obstinate hard-heartedness. Each is in anxious suspense because no word is spoken, and in trembling fear lest anyone should speak.

Each felt that this moment could never come back to them again. The walls we build up between one another rise ever higher and higher; our own offence, the offence

of others, seems to grow greater with every breath we draw. At one moment we are deep in despair, in indignation the next. Such treatment of us, we feel, is merciless and hard-hearted, and we will never put up with it nor forgive it. Petra could stand it no longer; she felt she must either cry out or run away.

Suddenly came the sound of sleigh-bells from the road, and then a man in wolf-skin clothing, with a post-boy behind him, was seen dashing by the garden and into the yard. Each drew a long breath in anxious expectation of deliverance! They heard the traveller in the passage, they heard him taking off his travelling-boots, and talking to the maid as she helped him. The priest rose from his place to go and greet him, but turned back, not wishing to leave the two girls alone. Again they heard the stranger talking in the hall, and this time the sound of his voice was nearer, and made them all three look up. Petra rose and fixed her eyes on the door—there was a knock.

"Come in," said the priest, in an excited voice; and a man with a fresh, clear face, and glasses over his eyes, stood on the threshold.

Petra uttered a cry and sank back into her chair. It was Oedegaard.

He did not come quite as a surprise to the priest and Signe, for they had expected him at the parsonage for Christmas, although they had told Petra nothing about it. But all felt that it was the hand of Providence that had brought him there just at that moment.

Before Petra fully realized what had happened, he was standing by her with her hand in his. He continued to hold it, but neither he nor she spoke—indeed, she could not even rise from her seat—but two tears trickled down her cheeks as she sat there looking at him. He was very pale, but quite calm and tender. He let go her hand,

walked across the floor, and turned to Signe, who had hidden herself in the furthest window among her mother's flowers.

Petra longed to be alone, and crept away; Signe went diligently about her household work, and the priest took Oedegaard into his study and refreshed him with a glass of wine, which he much needed after his journey. As they sat there, he told him in a few words all that the last few days had brought with them. Oedegaard listened and said nothing, but grew very thoughtful. They were interrupted however in a somewhat strange way.

Two women and three men walked past the windows in single file, and the priest no sooner caught sight of them than he sprang up, exclaiming: "Here they come again. Now we shall need all our patience."

In filed the women, slowly and silently followed by the men. They ranged themselves along the wall beneath the book-shelves and opposite the sofa on which Oedegaard was sitting. The priest set chairs before them and got others from the sitting-room. All then sat down, with the exception of a young man, dressed as if he came from the town; he refused a chair, and remained standing by the doorpost, both hands in his pockets, and a certain air of defiance in his looks.

After a long silence, during which the priest filled his pipe, and Oedegaard—who did not smoke—closely scanned the party, a pale, fair-skinned woman, who seemed to be about forty years old, began to speak. Her forehead was rather narrow; her eyes large but timorous, and seemed not to know where to look.

"That was a fine sermon you preached to-day, parson," she said, at length, "it just fitted in with what we were all thinking about; for we have lately been constantly talking about temptation up at Oeygars."

She sighed, and a man with a short crabbed jaw and chin, and a large broad forehead, sighed as well, and said:

"Lord, turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way."

Then Else, the first speaker, gave another sigh, saying:

"Wherewithal shall the young cleanse their ways?—by taking heed thereto according to Thy word."

This sounded strange coming from her, for she was no longer young.

And now a man of middle-age, who sat rocking to and fro on his chair, his head on one side, and his eyes half-shut, murmured, as if in a dream:

> "Of trial and-temptation sore
> Each one must have his share,
> That has his part in Jesu's death,
> And His dear name would bear."

The priest knew them too well not to be aware that all this was merely by way of prologue; so he waited as if nothing had been said, and silence, broken only by deep sighs, fell upon them again.

A little woman, whose stooping figure made her look even smaller than she was, and who was wrapped up in such a vast number of shawls that she looked a mere bundle of them—her face was quite hidden—presently began to rock and sway about, and gave vent to a couple of short grunts. Straightway the fair-haired woman was set off again:

"There is an end to all sorts of playing and dancing up at Oeygars now," she said; "but—but——" and she paused, whereupon Lars, the man with the short jaw and broad brow, went on:

"—but there is *one* man, Hans Fiddler, who *will* not leave off——" and, as Lars paused to consider how to

get out the rest of what he wanted to say, the young man took it up:

"—for he knows that the parson himself has an instrument, and that the people at the parsonage both sing and dance to it——"

"—and it surely can't be a greater sin for him than it is for the parson," said Lars.

"The fact is," said Else, cautiously, trying to get to the point, "the parson's music acts as a temptation to him."

And the young man added, vehemently:

"It is an offence unto the young, and it is written, 'Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.'"

It was now Lars' turn to take up the running:

"Therefore we desire that you will send away your instrument or cast it into the fire, so that it be no longer for an offence——"

"—to the children of thy care," added the young man.

The priest drew in his smoke and puffed it out again, and at last, with an evident effort to control himself, spoke:

"To me the music is not a temptation, but rather recreation and relief. Now you know that the things which refresh and relieve our souls bring us nearer to receiving the truth and understanding it; therefore, I believe that such things as my music are of a certainty helpful to me."

"And I know," said the young man, "that there are priests who, as S. Paul hath enjoined, would willingly forsake at the request of the children of their cure whatsoever may be 'a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall.'"

"It may be," answered the priest, "that I, too, once interpreted his words as you do, but now I no longer do so. One may well give up a habit or a self-gratification it is true, but he is not required to make himself narrow and foolish

with the narrow and foolish. I should be acting wrongly not only towards myself, but also to those to whom I have to set an example; for I should be setting them a foolish example—an example contrary to my own convictions."

Seldom was the priest able to give such a long explanation as this, when he was not in the pulpit; and now he added:

"I will neither give up my instrument nor burn it, and I shall often listen to its music, I hope, for I have often need to do so; and I would that you, too, in all innocence, might now and again refresh your souls with song and music and dancing; for such things I hold well for you and fitting."

The young man gave a grunt of contemptuous disgust, turned his head aside, and spat on the floor.

The blood rushed up to the priest's face: deep silence reigned over all, until the man who sat swaying from side to side broke forth in a high voice:

"O Lord my God, on every side
I see the signs of pain and woe;
Each one his cross must patient bear;
Mighty or weakling, high or low,
We all must suffer and endure:
But flesh is feeble, and we know
That Thou——"

Here Lars burst in in sarcastic tones:

"You say then that dancing and music are good, do you? Come, then,—it's good for us, is it, to stir up Satan in our senses? So that's what our parson says, does he? He tells us that idle and sensual pleasures recreate and help us!—that things that tempt us are good for us! Well, well, at any rate we know what he thinks now."

But here Oedegaard quickly broke in, for he saw that the priest was being worked up into a furious passion:

"Tell me, my good fellow," he said, "what is there which may *not* become a temptation to us?"

All looked at him from whom these well-weighed words came. The question was in itself so unexpected that neither Lars nor any of the others knew for a moment what answer to make. But as if from the depths of a well, or from far down in a cellar, there came the word:

"Work."

The voice came from the bundle of shawls: it was Randi, who now for the first time took part in discussion. A smile of triumph broke over Lar's short jaw, the fair woman looked at her with eyes full of faith, and even the young man standing by the door-post forgot for a moment the scornful curve of his lips. Oedegaard at once saw that she was their head, although her own was not to be seen. He therefore turned towards her and said:

"If work is to be without temptation, of what kind must it be, pray?"

She could not answer for a moment, but the young man interposed:

"'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread,' saith the curse: wherefore our work must bring us sweat and toil."

"And nothing but sweat and toil, then? Is it to bring us no advantage, for example?"

This silenced the young man, too, for a moment; but now the spirit moved the short-faced man:

"Yes," he said, "as much as you can get out of it."

"Well, then, there may easily be a temptation lurking in one's work—I mean the temptation to get too much out of it."

In these straits, succour came from out of the depths:

"It is the profit then that tempts us, not the work."

"Well, what difference does that make, if the work is carried too far for profit's sake?"

She beat a retreat again, but Lars sallied boldly forth:

"Work carried too far? What do you mean by that?"

"Why, when it makes a man a brute—the mere slave of itself."

"There must needs be slavery," came from him who had insisted on toil and sweat.

"But can work which is done in a slavish spirit lead us to God?"

"Work is the worship of God!" cried Lars.

"Dare you say that of *all* your work?"

Lars was dumb.

"No, you cannot! You must be fair, and grant that for profit's sake work may be carried to such a pitch that it becomes the only thing we live for! Wherefore, even in work there is temptation."

"Yes, children, yes, there is temptation in all things—temptation in everything!" said the priest, as if giving judgment; and rising, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, for a sign that the discussion was over. A sigh came from among the shawls, but no one spoke.

"Listen to me!" began Oedegaard again—and the priest filled his pipe afresh—"listen!—if work brings forth its fruits, *i.e.* profit, surely we are allowed to enjoy these fruits, are we not? And if it bring us riches, shall we not enjoy them too?"

These questions seemed to make them all very thoughtful, and they looked at one another musingly.

"Let me answer while you are thinking over it," Oedegaard went on. "God must have permitted us to try and turn His curse into a blessing, for with His own hand He guided His patriarchs and His chosen people to the enjoyment of riches."

"The Apostles were enjoined to have nothing," interjected the young man, in a tone as if these words settled the question.

"True enough, for them He wished to place above and beyond all earthly things so that they might set

their eyes on God alone;—they were called of the Lord!"

"So are we all!"

"Yes, but not in the same way. Are you, for instance, called to be an apostle?"

The young man turned deathly pale, and his eyes grew dark beneath his massive, over-hanging brow; there must have been some special reason for his feeling these words so deeply.

"But the rich must work as well as the poor," said Lars, "for work is enjoined on all."

"Most certainly, but their objects and methods are different; each has his own work to do. But tell me this: shall a man do nothing but work?"

"He shall likewise pray!" came from the lips of the fair-haired woman; and she folded her hands as if she suddenly called to mind that she had long neglected to do so.

"Well, then, whenever a man's not working he is to be praying, is he? Is that possible for anyone? What sort of prayer, what sort of work, would such a one's be? Is he never to have any rest, pray?"

"We are to rest," said Else, "when we are too tired to work any longer; for thus we shall escape the temptation of evil thoughts,—yes, thus alone can we avoid being tempted!"

And he who had before quoted the hymns started off again:

"O, when worn out with toil,
With earthly swink and moil,
Ye rest your weary head,
Ask ye sweet Jesu's care,
For soon shall men prepare
In earth your narrow bed."

"Do be quiet, Erik, and listen to what's being said," urged the priest, as Oedegaard began to sum up.

"You see, then," he said, "the worker brings forth fruit and needs rest: and it seems to me that the pleasures of social intercourse, singing, music, and the like, are not only the sweet and lawful fruit of labour, but also give the soul strengthening refreshment and support."

These statements caused great excitement in the opposing camp. All looked at Randi, as if now was the time for the main guard to advance. Rocking from side to side, she at length said in a low, deliberate voice:

"There can surely be no real refreshment in worldly songs, music, and dancing; since such things urge the flesh to sinful desires. Surely that cannot be a lawful fruit of our labour which wastes it and weakens us."

"Ah! indeed, there is great temptation in such things!" sighed out the fair-haired woman, and Erik started off again into a hymn:

"Crimes and vices growing greater
Every day, we mark with sorrow;
Creeping on our spirits softly,
Sins the guise of virtue borrow;
Once within those holy places
Bold they show their real faces."

"Do be quiet, Erik," said the priest; "you only distract us."

"Ah, yes, no doubt I do," said Erik; and off he started again:

"If ever one with wheedling words
On you should try his art,
To lead thee into sin's smooth, broad ways,
With him have thou no part."

"Come now, Erik, you really must hold your tongue for a bit," cried the priest. "Hymns are well enough, but at the right time and place."

"Yes, yes, parson, that's true enough—always at the right time and place:

"In every place and time
To praise Him be thy care,
Each heart-beat help to chime
Bells calling thee to prayer."

"Come, come, Erik! even prayer would be a temptation at this rate. You must turn Papist and go into a cloister——"

"God forbid!" cried Erik, opening his eyes wide, and then shutting them again as he sang out:

"As mud and dirt by veriest gold
Is the Papist's creed to——"

"Look here now, Erik, if you can't be quiet, you must really go out of the room!—Where was it we left off?"

Oedegaard did not remember; he had been following Erik's proceedings with much amusement. But a peaceful voice was heard from amidst the shawls:

"I was saying that that cannot really refresh us or be a lawful fruit of toil which, like dancing and——"

"Now I remember; we were saying that there was temptation in——and then Erik came and showed us that there can be temptation even in prayer. Let us see then what we can get out of this. Have you noticed that the happy work better than the dejected? And why is this?"

Lars saw the drift of this question, and made answer:

"It is only faith that makes us really happy."

"Yes, when our faith is not a gloomy one; but have you never seen that a man's religion may make him so gloomy that the world is nothing but a penitentiary to him?"

The fair woman uttered sigh upon sigh with such persistence that it stirred up the bundle of shawls to sway about again; but Lars looked at her severely, and she was mute again. Oedegaard went on:

"Being always at the same thing, whether work, prayer, or sport, makes a man stupid and gloomy. You may dig

in the earth till you're no better than a brute, pray till you're a monkish slave, play till you're no better yourself than a mere plaything. But do some of each, and the change from one to the other will brace up your heart and mind, your work will prosper, and your belief be the happier."

"We should try to be cheerful, then, you say?" said the young man with a scornful laugh.

"Yes, for so would you, for your part, be brought into sympathy with the rest of mankind; for not till a man is happy can he see what there is good in other men and love it. But unless you love other men, you cannot love God."

As no one was ready to contradict that, Oedegaard tried once more to sum up his remarks:

"Such things as set our minds free, so that the Holy Spirit may do its work in us—for He finds no room to work in those whose minds are fettered down—such things as are helpful to us must of necessity carry a blessing with them; and this is what the things we have been speaking of do."

The priest rose, and once more knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

In the silence which followed—silence unbroken even by a sigh—the bundle of shawls worked about uneasily, and at last there came a gentle voice from it:

"It is written, 'Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God'; but can worldly music, singing, and dancing be to His glory?"

"Directly, no; but may we not say the same of our eating, sleeping, dressing? And yet we are bound to do these things. Therefore the meaning of the text must be that you shall do nothing which is sinful."

"Yes; but are not these things sinful?"

For the first time Oedegard began to get somewhat impatient.

"We see," he said, "from the Bible that not only singing, but also music and dancing were made use of——"

"Yes, for the glory of God."

"Granted; for the glory of God, then. But the Jews named God in all things, because they were like children, and had not learnt to distinguish one thing from another. To a child all strangers are alike 'the man.' To the child's question, 'Where does this come from?' 'Where does that come from?' we give always the same answer, 'From God;' but when men speak to men, we do not name only the prime giver, God, but we mention the intermediaries as well. Thus, for example, a beautiful song may be a work of God and lead us to Him, though His name be never mentioned in it; for many things which do not lead us straight to Him, yet draw us towards His throne. Our dancing, so long as it is really healthy, innocent amusement, is, if not a thanksgiving in words, yet all the same a method of thanking Him who gives us our health and loves the child within our hearts."

"Listen to that! listen to that!" said the priest. He knew that he himself had long misunderstood these things, and had caused others to misunderstand them.

But Lars had long been sitting deep in thought, and now he was ready. The grains of wisdom had been slowly dropping from the high, broad forehead to the short, crabbed jaws, and now, crushed and winnowed and ground, the meal came forth:

"Are all kinds of tales, stories, and fables, all sorts of poetry and fiction, such as books are filled with now-a-days, allowable? Is it not written, 'Every word that goeth out of thy lips shall be truth?'"

"I'm very glad you reminded me of that. Look here, a man's mind is like the house he lives in. If it's so small that he can scarcely hold his head up or stretch his limbs out in it, he must do his best to enlarge it. Now, poetry

makes our thoughts wider and loftier. If all our thoughts of things above our actual needs were false, then our thoughts of things actually needful would soon be false too. They would so fetter you to your earthly dwelling that you would never near the Eternal, which is just the goal you are striving to reach; and it is just those thoughts of things above us which, by the help of faith, will carry us there."

"But," said Randi thoughtfully, "does not fiction tell about things that have never happened? Is it not, then, all full of lies?"

"No," replied Oedegaard; "there is often more truth in fiction than in the things we think we see."

They all looked at him doubtfully, and the young man observed:

"I never knew before that there was more truth in the tales about 'Askeladd'[1] than in what lies before my eyes." And the rest all giggled a little at this.

"Tell me, then, do you always understand the things you see going on around you?" said Oedegaard.

"No, of course not. I'm not learned enough."

"Ah, the learned are even less able to account for things than you are. Look, for instance, at the things in daily life which cause us grief and pain, and which, as the saying is, we worry ourselves black about. Don't such things ever befall us?"

He made no answer; but from the shawls came an earnest—

"Yes, indeed; often and often."

"But suppose, now, you heard a tale, which was so like your own case, that in listening to it you understand your own? Would you not say that this story, which made

[1] "Askeladd" is the hero of a Norse fairy-tale; he is a male counterpart of our Cinderella.—*Tr.*

your own case clear to you, and gave you that courage and consolation that comes of understanding—would you not say that that tale had more real truth in it than the actual facts of your own life?"

"I once read a tale," said the fair woman, "which so helped me in my great sorrow, that what had before seemed to me so sad, became almost a cause of rejoicing to me."

"Yes, that is quite true," came with a timid cough from among the shawls.

But the young man was by no means satisfied.

"Can the stories about 'Askeladd' be of any help to any one?" he asked.

"Well, well; everything has its own use. Humour appeals to most of us very strongly, and those stories show in a comical way that what the world values least may be of the greatest account; that all can be made to help the man who has a stout heart, and that a man can do what he makes up his mind to do. Don't you think many children, not to say grown-up folks, would do well to bear that in mind?"

"But surely it is superstitious to believe in witches and trolls?"

"Nobody said you should believe in such things. In such tales, the expressions are mere figures of speech."

"But it is forbidden us to use images and figures. Like all other deceits, they belong to the devil."

"Do they? Where do you find that?"

"In the Bible."

"No," said the priest, breaking suddenly in; "there you are mistaken; the Bible itself makes use of figures."

All looked up at him.

"It uses figures on every page, for Eastern peoples are much given to them. We ourselves use figures in our churches and in our speech, on wood, on canvas, and on

stone, and we cannot form any idea of the Godhead except through pictures or figures. Nor is this all: Jesus uses figures constantly. Did not the Lord God himself use many forms when he declared himself unto His prophets? Did he not come to Abraham in Mamre, and take meat at his table in a traveller's guise? But if the Godhead deigned to put on many forms, and freely to use figures, surely we men may safely do so."

They were forced to assent. Oedegaard, springing up, tapped the priest gently on the shoulder.

"Thanks!" he whispered. "You have proved most clearly from the Bible that play-acting is allowable!"

The priest was dumb with amazement. The smoke in his mouth curled slowly out of its own accord.

Oedegaard walked across the floor to her of the many shawls, and bent down to try and catch a glimpse of her face, but could not succeed.

"Is there anything more you want to know?" he asked: "you seem to me to have thought a good deal about one thing and another."

"Ah, Lord help me! very often I don't think in the right way."

"When one is first filled with the grace of conversion, one is so taken up with its wonders, that all else seems useless and vain beside it. One is like a lover, who desires nothing save his loved one."

"Ah, but look at the first Christians; surely they ought to be our patterns."

"No; their difficult life among the heathen is no longer ours; our duties are different; it is for us to bring our Christianity into the life of to-day."

"But there are so many things in the Old Testament which speak in a spirit quite the opposite of what you say," said the young man, and this time with no sneer in his voice.

"True; but those things have no longer any force for us—they are 'done away,' as S. Paul says: 'We are able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter but of the spirit;' and further: 'Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' And again says S. Paul: 'All things are lawful for me, but,' he adds, 'all things are not expedient.' Now we are fortunate enough to have before us the life of a man who has shown us what S. Paul meant, namely Luther's. You will admit of course that Luther was a pious and enlightened Christian?"

Yes, they were sure of that.

"Luther's creed was a cheerful one, for it was that of the New Testament. He thought that behind a gloomy creed was pretty generally to be found the devil. As for constant fear of temptation, he thought that those who feared least were least tempted. He made use of all the capacities God had granted him, not forgetting the capacity for enjoyment, and this he did his whole life long. Will you listen to some instances of it? The pious Melancthon was once so hard at work on a defence of the pure Religion, that he did not give himself time for his meals. Luther came and snatched the pen out of his hand: 'We serve God not by work alone,' he said, 'but also by rest and recreation; for this has God given us the Third Commandment and instituted the Sabbath.' Moreover, Luther did not think it amiss to use figures and images when he spoke, sometimes of a sportive, at others of an earnest kind, and he was full of fine and often merry thoughts. Further, he translated into his mother-tongue many good old fairy-tales, saying in the preface to his translation that, except the Bible, he knew nothing that contained finer moral teaching than they do. As you probably know, he played on the zither, and was wont to join with friends and children in singing—not only hymns, but also merry old songs. He liked social gatherings, he

played chess, and had young people to his house to dance; all he required was that they should behave modestly and reputably. A certain simple-minded old disciple of his, one Johann Mathesius, has written all this down about him, and used to preach on it to his flock from the pulpit: he prayed it might serve them for an example: let us pray so too!"

"Dear friends," said the priest rising, "this is enough for to-day."

The others all rose, and he went on:

"Much has been said that may enlighten us; may God help the good seed to bring forth! Dear friends, you live in lonely and desolate places, where the corn is more often cut short by the frost than by the sickle; on barren spots far upon the mountains, which were more fitly given over to imps and elves and nibbling goats. The spirit grows up there short and gloomy like the plants around. Superstition hangs over life there like the crags beneath which it is engendered, overshadowing men and severing them from one another. The Lord unite you! the Lord give you light! I thank you for coming here to-day, my friends. For me, as well as for you, it has been a day of great enlightening."

He shook each of them by the hand, and even the young man gave his hand a friendly pressure, though he did not look up.

"You are going back over the mountain," said the priest as they were about to set out; "when will you reach your homes again?"

"O, some time to-night," answered Lars. "The snow has been falling very thickly, and where the wind has blown it away, the road is covered with solid ice."

"Indeed, friends, you deserve all praise for coming to church under such circumstances. I hope you will all get home in safety."

Erik quietly answered:

"Be God my guide, then what to me
Is open foe or secret snare?
Safe ever shall my journeyings be,
In loving Jesu's tender care."

"Ah! that's true Erik," said the priest; "this time you've hit the right nail on the head."

"But wait a moment," said Oedegaard, as they were on the point of departing. "It's not strange that you don't recognise me, but I think there must still be some kinsfolk of mine up at Oeygars."

All turned and looked at the speaker at these words—not excepting the priest, who, it is true, had been told of Oedegaard's connection with the place before, but had forgotten it.

"My name is Hans Oedegaard; I am the son of the priest Knud Hansen Oedegaard, who once wandered out from amongst you, his wallet on his back."

"Goodness gracious!" came from among the shawls; "he was my brother!"

All stood still in silence, no one knowing what to say; at length Oedegaard asked:

"Was it not you, then, whom we stayed with, when I was a little fellow, and my father took me up there with him?"

"Yes, you stopped with me."

"And with me too for a little time," said Lars: "your father is my first cousin."

"So you are that little Hans!—ah! how the time goes!" said Randi sadly.

"And how is Else?" asked Oedegaard.

"That is Else," said Randi, pointing to the fair woman.

"Are you Else?" he cried. "I remember you were in grief about your love affairs at that time; did you have your way and marry the fiddler?"

There was no answer, but in spite of the deepening twilight he could see Else growing redder and redder, while the men's eyes wandered round the room or sought the floor—save the young man's, who looked piercingly and directly at her.

Oedegaard felt that he had asked an awkward question, but the priest came to his rescue:

"No, Hans Fiddler is unmarried; Else married Lars' son, but she is free to marry again now; she is a widow."

Else blushed still more violently, and the young man looked at her and smiled scornfully.

"Well," said Randi, "you have travelled about a lot, I suppose? I can see you have become a very learned man."

"Till now I have done nothing but travel and study; but now I mean to settle down and get to work."

"Ah, that's how things are in this world! Some of us journey forth and draw nigh to light and wisdom, while others have to stop at home."

"And the soil of our fathers' land is often hard to till," added Lars; "but when we raise up from it a man who might help us, he straightway leaves us."

"Each has his own bent," said the priest. "Each must obey his own Call."

"And the Lord will direct the whole work, be sure!" added Oedegaard. "If God will, my father's work shall yet return to you."

"Ah yes, that we believe," said Randi with a touch of sadness; "but it's dreary waiting, and it's so long one has to do it."

They went their way, and the priest at one window and Oedegaard at the other watched them as they filed up over the mountain side, the young man bringing up the rear. Of him, the priest told Oedegaard that he was from the town, where he had been engaged in one occupation after another, but had always managed to fall foul of those

about him. He was always fancying that he was born for some great work, and now had got the notion that he was destined to be an apostle, but much to everybody's surprise he had stopped on at Oeygars, perhaps, as some said, from love of Else; his was a fiery, passionate nature, that had already met with many a disillusioning, and for which there were more in store.

They could now see the travellers again on the mountain side as they rose above the roof of the cattle-shed. Slowly they worked their way, ever onward and upward, sometimes hidden by the trees, sometimes plain in their sight. The thick snow hid the pathways, but the trees showed them their way, and the snow-peaks marked their goal.

But to the watchers in the windows came the sound of keys swept in sweet joyous cadence, and then the words:

"O to what should I sing
If not to the Spring,
Though not yet herself be here?
To the haunts will I fly
Where she hiding doth lie,
And lure forth the Sun's bright cheer;
From the Earth's brown face,
Old Winter I'll chase,
And set ev'ry brook rippling free;
And the warm, sweet hours,
Shall be fragrant with flowers,
While the birds sing out in their glee;
And the groves shall ring,
With the praises we'll sing,
Of the young, the joyous, the radiant Spring!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### PETRA'S CONSECRATION.

FROM that day the priest began to spend little of his time with the others; partly because he was busy with Christmas affairs, and partly because he was trying hard to satisfy himself as to whether play-acting was or was not allowable to a Christian. The bare sight of Petra was enough to make him fall into a reverie at once.

While the priest was sitting in his study with a sermon or a book of Christian ethics before him, Oedegaard spent his time with the girls, whose natures he was constantly comparing with one another. Petra's was a glowing, sparkling spirit, never quite the same for two moments: he who would know her must give his whole mind to her as to a book. In Signe, on the other hand, was ever the same sweet, constant kindliness; her movements mirrored her being, and were therefore never of a startling kind. Petra's voice could assume all tones, sweet or bitter, and any degree of loudness or softness. Signe's was peculiarly pleasant to hear, but there was little variety in it, save indeed to her father's ear, for he could distinguish the slightest shades of change in it. Petra was fully taken up by one, and only one, thing at a time; were her mind attracted by more than one, it was merely as one who

looked on, without taking any share in them. But Signe had an eye for everything and everybody, and quietly, and in a way that called no attention on itself, gave her services equally to all. When Oedegaard talked with Petra of Signe, he seemed to be listening to the complaint of a hopeless lover; when he talked with Signe of Petra, he could get little from her. The two girls constantly spoke to one another; but though they talked without constraint, they never touched on anything but indifferent topics.

Oedegaard had feelings of great thankfulness to Signe, for it was to her that he owed what he called his "new manhood." The first letter which he received from Signe in his great sorrow was like a gentle hand upon his brow. As she described to him with delicate care how Petra had come to them, misunderstood and harshly treated, and as she modestly pointed out to him that what seemed to be "Chance" in her coming there must in reality be the ordering of God, so "that nothing be lost," it sounded to him as a friendly voice sounds to him who wanders in the depths of some forest and knows not which way to turn.

Signe's letters went with him wherever he went, and were his guiding-strings. She thought that every line she wrote would help to lead him back to Petra's embrace, but as a fact they had just the opposite effect; for forth from these letters rose Petra's artist's nature before him. The key to her being, which he himself had ever sought in vain, Signe unwittingly kept ever in view: and as soon as he recognized this, he saw the mistake which he—as well as she—had made, and it restored him to manhood again.

He took good care not to let Signe see what he had learnt from her letters, for the first word must come from Petra herself, and not from any of those around her, lest she might be urged to go too fast. But from the time when this dawned upon him, Petra stood before him in a new light. Of course, it was clear enough now: these

ever-shifting, restless moments of feeling—each one having full sway while it lasted, each contradicting the other—were nothing but indications of the not-yet-full-grown artist's temperament. His task must be to gather them all into one firm whole, else would all her efforts be but patchwork and her life itself a mere sham. But above all, then, he must guard against her beginning too early: silence must be his plan as long as possible—yes, opposition itself if necessary.

His mind thus busy, he was scarcely aware of it before Petra was once more the main object of his life—but not now for his own sake. He gave much of his time to observing the lives of artists in general and actors in particular. He saw much in them to dismay a Christian: he found monstrous abuses; but abuses he found everywhere, even in the Church itself. But because some priests were unworthy and base, did that make the calling itself less great or solemn? If the work of enlightenment, which he felt to be going on everywhere around, had taken its roots in life and poetry, should it not also be found on the stage?

By degrees he grew certain that he was right, and it caused him much joy to see from Signe's letters that Petra's powers were developing so, and that Signe was just the right person to help her. And now he had come to see and thank the guardian angel, who herself knew not what she had been to him.

But he had also come to see Petra, and find out how far she had gone. The word had been uttered, and so he could at any rate talk freely with her of the matter; that was very welcome to them both, for thus they were able to avoid speaking of the past.

And now guests from the town—unbidden as well as bidden—began to pour in upon them. Now things were in such a state that any chance opportunity, turned to good account, might set everything straight; and this

chance was afforded them by the guests. A large gathering had been got together in their honour, and it happened that when the gentlemen were assembled in the study, after dinner, the conversation turned on play-acting; for a certain chaplain who was present had caught sight of a book of Christian ethics lying open on the priest's table, and his eye had been caught by that word of peril, "play-acting." Thereupon arose a vehement discussion, and in the midst of it in came the priest, for he had not been present at dinner, because he had been sent for to visit a sick man: he was very grave, and neither partook of food nor joined in the talk; but he filled his pipe and listened attentively. As soon as Oedegaard saw that the priest was quietly listening, he tried to get his views clearly put before the others, but it was long in vain; for each time Oedegaard endeavoured to draw an inference, the chaplain had a way of cring out, "I deny your premisses; I don't agree to it," so that Oedegaard had first to prove the facts he made use of to prove other things; in this way their argument went further and further back, so that they had got from play-acting to navigation, and from navigation to agriculture.

So at Oedegaard's suggestion the priest was to act as chairman. Besides him, there were present several other priests and a sea-captain, a swarthy little man with a huge paunch and a couple of thin little legs beneath it, that moved as if made of wood. The chaplain was invited to put into words his objections against play-acting.

"The drama," he said, "was opposed by the more righteous of the pagans themselves. Plato and Aristotle were against it, because it was a corruptor of morals. Socrates, it is true, sometimes was present at the acting of plays; but I deny that that justifies any one in concluding that he approved of them, for one is forced to see many things one does not approve of. The early Christians

were earnestly warned against play-acting. Just read Tertullian! Since the restoration of the drama in more modern times, earnest Christians have constantly spoken and written against it. I need only mention such names as those of Spener and Francke, a Christian philosopher such as Schwarz; I need but remind you of Schleiermacher."

"Hear, hear!" cried the captain, for he had heard the name Schleiermacher before.

"The two last admit that dramatic poetry is not unlawful, and Schleiermacher would even allow really good dramas to be performed at private gatherings, but not by professional actors; for he utterly condemns the acting as a business; it offers so many temptations to a Christian, that it is his duty to avoid it. And does it not offer temptation to the spectators as well, pray? To be moved by imaginary woes, and to have our emotions played on by feigned virtues (a thing against which we can more easily guard ourselves when we read), lures us on to fancy ourselves to be the thing we see; it weakens the will and self-dependence, and fills our minds with desire to hear, see, and be amused. Will any one deny this? Who are the greatest frequenters of the theatre? Idle loafers, who want to be entertained; sensualists, who desire to have their senses tickled; the vain and the frivolous, who wish to make a show of themselves; and sickly idealists, who flee to the stage for shelter from the actual facts of life, which they dare not grapple with. There is sin before the curtain, sin behind the curtain; and I never knew any sincere Christian but said the same."

Captain: "I really am quite afraid to think where I've been. If I've really been in such a den of wolves each time I've been at the play, why, devil take——"

"Fy! captain," said a little girl, who had come into the study, "fy! you must not swear, for if you do, you'll go to hell."

"Right, right my child—I will not."

"Plato," began Oedegaard, "had the same objections against poetry as against acting, and as for Aristotle's opinion, it is doubtful. I will therefore let that pass. The early Christians did well to keep aloof from *Pagan* plays —so I will let that pass too. That in later times, earnest Christians have had doubts as to the lawfulness of acting, even among Christians, I can quite understand; for I too had my doubts at one time. But if any allows that the poet is at liberty to write a play, then must he also grant that the actor may act it; for what does the poet do but act it, even while he is writing it?—he is acting it in his thoughts, with all his senses and all his passions; and you know Christ's own words, "Whosoever *looketh* on a woman to lust after her," etc. But if Schleiermacher tells us that a play may be acted indeed, but only in private and by unpractised persons; then he is saying that the powers we have received from God are not to be fully cultivated; but surely God's meaning is that we shall develop them to the utmost, for that is the purpose for which we have received them. But we are all of us acting every day of our lives; both when in jest or in earnest we imitate others, or are subject to their influence. In some people, this power of imitation is far greater than in others, and if such people neglect to turn their powers to their proper uses, it would not be long, I am quite sure, before the evidences of their sin would appear of its own accord. For the man who does not follow the calling his powers fit him for becomes irresolute, restless, and unfitted for any other, and therefore falls a far easier prey to temptation than if he had followed his natural bent. Where work and pleasure are one, there is not nearly so much room for temptation. But, you say, the work is in itself too full of temptation. Well, every man feels temptation in a different way, I suppose. For my part, that calling seems to me to offer

far the greatest temptation, that tricks a man into thinking that he himself is righteous, because he bears a message from the Righteous One; into believing that he himself has Faith, because he preaches Faith to others;—or to put it more clearly: to me the calling of the priesthood offers the greatest of all temptations."

At this many voices uprose.

"I deny it!"

"I quite agree with him!"

"Silence!"

"That's quite true!"

"Silence!"

"I never heard before," said the captain, "that priests were worse than play-actors."

At this some laughed, and a voice cried out:

"No, no; he didn't say they were."

"Now," said the captain, "may the devil——"

"Hush, hush! captain," came from the little girl; "the devil will come for you at once."

"Well, well, child, I won't swear," answered the captain. And Oedegaard went on:

"All the temptation to get our emotions stirred for the moment, and to settle down to the mere pleasures of hearing and imagining, and the temptation of fancying ourselves the models of virtue we see held up to our admiration, without making earnest effort to become like them—all these temptations, I say, are undoubtedly to be met with in the Church too."

Loud clamour broke out afresh at this, and attracted the ladies to come and see what these repeated outbursts of noise might mean. Through the open door, Oedegaard saw Petra standing among them. There was a deeper earnestness in his tone as he went on:

"Of course there are actors who are easily stirred when on the stage; who run thence to church, and are equally

easily stirred there,—and for all that are no better than before. And of course there are actors who are mere wind-bags, and who in any other calling would be absolutely useless, but who in their own are of some service as wind-bags. But, on the whole, I believe that actors, like sailors, are so often placed in difficult situations—for the moment before coming on to the stage must often be extremely terrible to them—and are so often called to be the means (under God) of saving others, and are so often set face to face with the sublime and the unexpected, that there springs up in their hearts a sense of awe and of yearning, and a deep feeling of their own unworthiness; and it was, we know, among contrite women and among publicans that Christ chiefly tarried. I give the actor no special license; indeed, the greater the work he is called upon to do in the land—and how great his work is may be judged from the smallness of the number of really great actors—the deeper is his guilt, if he stoops to turn his talents to the service of hatred or envy, or lets them be degraded at the call of loose frivolity. But just as there is no actor who has not learnt, by repeated disappointments, how worthless is applause and flattery, even while they affect to believe in it,—so do we see their errors and deficiencies; but we don't quite understand their own position, and everything turns on that."

At this, several began to talk all at once; but from the next room came floating in the words of the old ballad:

"Methought that the byegone days had returned,"

and they all streamed in to listen to Signe's singing, for no one could sing the Scandinavian folk-songs like Signe. One ballad followed another, and then when all were inspirited and exalted by the sound of their native songs—surely the fairest outpouring of a great people's soul and the finest ballad poetry the world has ever seen—Oedegaard

rose and asked Signe to recite something to them. She had evidently been expecting it, for she came forward at once, though she blushed deeply, and her limbs trembled so that she had to lean on the back of a chair; then, a sudden death-like pallor overspreading her face, she began:

"His father and mother were weak and old,
He was their joy and their hope and their stay;
Yet spite of their love and his home and his gold
Ever he yearned to be up and away.
'O wherefore,' they cried, 'seek'st thou peril and strife,
When here thou hast all that is pleasant in life?'

"Yet his heart was aflame when, like hosts to the fight,
The clouds swept grandly by;
His heart was aflame when the sun's bright light
Seemed a Viking's pomp in the sky.
And he recked not of home, and he recked not of gold,
As he gazed and he dreamt of the glories of old.

"He rose, and his way he took to the shore,
Where the surf beat heavy, the wind blew free:
He must hear the breakers' thunderous roar;
He must watch the strife 'twixt rocks and sea.
It was a day in the wakening spring,
When loud o'er the land doth the storm-voice ring:
'Now rouse thee, thou earth, from thine ice-bound sleep.'
"He felt the hot blood in his body leap.

"For a Viking's ship in the dim creek lay,
Holding the storm-king's wrath at bay.
Down was the anchor and furled the sail,
Yet the bark seemed but ill-content to rest;
The mast creaked, the timbers sang in the gale,
As the ship beat the surf with its swelling breast.

"Full fain were the Viking's men for a while
Their labours with revel and rest to beguile.
Lo! sudden a voice upon them broke
From the cliffs above, and, with wild words, spoke:
'Are you *all* afraid of a sea so high?
Come, give *me* the rudder—no peril fear I!"

" Hearing, a few looked up in surprise,
Most of them not even turned their eyes;
None of them ceased to drink or to eat.
Crash! a crag hurled—and two men crushed at their feet.

" Up started all from the deck where they lay,
Nought now of eating or drinking cared they;
Each, seizing his weapon, his arrow sped
At the youth who stood dauntless and bare o'erhead.
'Ho, captain! wilt *give* me,' he laughingly cries,
'Thy vessel, or say wilt thou fight for the prize?'

" No answer came from the Viking's tongue,
But full at the mocker a spear he flung;
It missed the rash stripling, who quietly said:
'Me await they not yet in the halls of the dead,
But for thee—thou hast ploughed every wave of the sea,
Thy labour is ended—they're waiting for thee.
Give unto me, then, all thy prowess has won,
For *thy* time is over—and *mine*, begun.'

" Loud the Viking laughed. 'Now if,' cried he,
'Thou long'st, as thou say'st, so sore,
Come down, and my warrior shalt thou be!'
Rang the answer swift from the shore:
'I must lead, not follow; the power must be mine,
Nor let e'er the young spirit the old confine.'

" No answer came to his words of pride;
Down he leapt, and he loudly cried:
'Ye warriors, shall we in battle show
Which one the War-God loves for his own?
Reverence and honour to him will ye owe,
And let shame be the due of the beaten alone?'

" At this the Viking, with wrath ablaze,
Plunged into the sea and swam to the strand;
The youth, with a shout of delight and praise,
Sprang in, and aided his rival to land.

" The Viking marked his fearless eye,
His noble look and bearing high:
'Arms,'—to his crew—'fling arms, I say;
And thou, if me thou chanc'st to slay,

At least shalt own to thee I brought
The sword by which my death was wrought.'

" They fought upon the rock-bound shore;
The eager war-birds scent their prize
'Mid clash of steel and ocean's roar;
Lo! now the Viking fallen lies!

" One wild shriek thrilled the mountain through,
A shriek of mingled rage and grief;
And, struggling through the surf, the crew
Stood vengeful round their dying chief.

" Then gently moved the Viking's hand,
For the last time he gave command:
'A man must fall, when fall he must;
The mightiest war-song needs must end.
Make *him* thy leader—'tis but just,
For he has conquered! See, they send
To light me now to Odin's board.'
So speaking, died the pirate-lord.

" The victor tarried little while;
Quick, rising on a stone, spake he:
'Build of these crags a mighty pile,
That all yon hero's might may see;
And then e'er dusk again away,
Nor let the dead the living stay.'

" They piled the cairn and they raised the sail
And the ship's breast scattered the sea-foam pale,
As a wild long dirge rang over the wave
For the leader loved that was gone,
And a welcoming shout for the leader brave
Who stood at the helm alone.

" The prow he turned to his home hard-by,
Where the folk stood gathering thick on the strand,
Much marvelling that, 'mid waves so high,
A ship dare venture so near the land.
And red in the rays of the evening sun
Lay the bark, and the cairn of the mighty one.

" Straight for the shore did the stripling steer;
' She must surely founder,' cried all in fear;
Quick round went the ship 'mid the seething spray,
' *Now* father,' laughed he, ' may I up and away ? "

Her voice had trembled, but she had spoken in a simple, dignified, and unaffected way. Her hearers stood gazing, as if a stream of light glowing with all the colours of the rainbow had welled up from the ground at their feet and flashed high up into the heavens above. No one spoke, no one stirred; till at last the captain could contain himself no longer, and, springing up, with heaving chest, he cried:

"I don't know how *you* all feel; but when *I* am carried away like this, devil take me if——"

"Captain, you're swearing again!" said the little girl, threatening him with her finger. "In a minute the devil *will* come and carry you off."

"Well, my dear, let him come, then. I don't care. But, devil take me or no, I must have a song of our fatherland."

Without further entreaty, Signe went to the piano, and presently the voices of the whole glad company were joined in patriotic song:

" In my land will I dwell,
And my land will I till;
Hers my prayer, and my arm, and my children shall be;
Her soil I'll defend,
And her wants I will tend,
From her uttermost hills to the sand of the sea.

" Hers is sunshine enough,
Hers are seed-fields enough,
If we all give our strength to our dear native land.
So sweet our Norse song,
And our might is so strong,
That her fame must rise high if together we stand.

" In the days that are dead
O'er the swan-path we sped,
And o'er many a country our stern yoke we threw;
Yet our banner to-day
Shall hold mightier sway,
And shine with a splendour the past never knew.

"From our three-cloven North
Shall great glory come forth
When but *one* mighty people are all of Norse blood.
Then lend all thy strength,
That the streamlets at length
May unite in one broad, ever-widening flood.

" O dearest on earth
Is this land of our birth,
As it was, as it is, and as yet it shall prove!
For the love that springs forth
For our home in the North
Makes the Northland wax great with the fruits of our love."

When Signe rose from the piano, she put her arm round Petra and drew her into the study, where no one else was.

"Petra," she said, "shall we be friends again?"

"O Signe, are you really going to forgive me at last?"

"There is nothing I couldn't forgive now. Petra, do you not love Oedegaard?"

"Signe!"

"O Petra, I thought you did from the very first day you came here; and I thought that he had come here at last to —to—— All that I have done or thought for you in these two years and a half was with that in view; and father, I know, thought the same. He has talked of it to Oedegaard, you may be sure."

"But, Signe!"

"Hush!" she whispered, putting her hand on Petra's mouth. And she darted away in answer to a call, for supper was about to be served.

There was wine on the table, for the priest had not been

present at dinner. Now he sat very quiet and grave, as if he were alone at table, till just as the others were on the point of rising; then, tapping his glass, he spoke:

"I have a betrothal to announce!" were his words.

All eyes were turned on the two girls, who were sitting side by side, and scarce knew whether to fall from their chairs or not.

"I have a betrothal to announce," said the priest again, as if finding it difficult to get on. "I will confess to you that at first I did not like the thought of it." All the guests here looked at Oedegaard in great astonishment, which grew greater and greater as he merely sat quietly looking at the priest. "I thought, to tell you the truth, that he was not worthy of her." The guests were now so embarrassed that they could not summon up courage to look up; and as the girls had not dared to do, after the opening words, the priest had only one hearer who looked at him, and that was Oedegaard, whose face was a picture of tranquil enjoyment. "But now," the priest went on, "now that I have got to know him better, I scarcely know whether she is worthy of him, so great is he in my eyes; for the bridegroom is Art, the actor's mighty Art, and his betrothed my foster daughter, my dear Petra. May you be happy together! I tremble to think of it; but those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. God be with you, my daughter!"

In a moment she was across the floor, and her head was on his breast.

As no one sat down again, all, of course, left the table. Petra went at once to Oedegaard, who drew her with him into the recess of the furthest window. He had something to say to her, but she spoke first:

"All this I owe to you!"

"No, Petra! I have been no more than a good brother to you. It was foolish of me ever to have wished to be

more; for if what I wanted had happened your whole life would have been spoilt."

"Oedegaard!"

They were holding one another's hands, but their eyes did not meet. A moment later he let go her hand and turned away. She sank into a chair and wept.

Next day Oedegaard had gone.

Towards spring, Petra received a large envelope with a big official seal on it: it quite frightened her, so she took it to the priest, who opened it and read the letter. It was from the town clerk of her native village, and ran as follows:

"Whereas, Pedro Ohlsen, who departed this life yesterday, has left a will, saying:

"'All that I possess, which is fully and accurately described in the account-book which lies in the blue chest in my room in Gunlaug Aamund's daughter's house on the hill, and of which the said Gunlaug alone has the key, and knows all that is required I hereby bequeath (if the aforesaid Gunlaug Aamund's daughter gives her consent, which she can only do by permitting a certain condition attached to this will to be fulfilled, which she alone can fulfil, being the only person who knows how) to Petra, daughter of the aforesaid Gunlaug Aamund's daughter, that is, if she cares to be reminded of a feeble old man whom she has made happy without knowing it—for she could not know it,—and whose only joy she has been during his last years; for which reason he has striven to make her some small return that he hopes she will not despise. God be merciful to me, a miserable sinner.

"'PEDRO OHLSEN.'"

"I take the liberty of asking whether you will communicate directly with your mother regarding this affair, or would prefer me to act for you?"

The next post brought her a letter from her mother, written by Hans Oedegaard's father, who was now the only person in whom she dared to confide. It told her that she gave her consent to the fulfilment of the condition, which was to tell Petra what Pedro was to her.

This news and the legacy gave fresh energy to Petra's determination; it seemed as if all things were shaping themselves to her views, but it was another incitement for her to leave the homestead.

So after all it was to develop Petra's artist's spirit that old Per Ohlsen had earned coppers by fiddling at bridals and dances, and it was for her that he had afterwards toiled and drudged, and his son after him, and his son's son. The sum was not a very great one, but it was enough to support her for a while when she went out into the world, and to help her on a bit faster.

And like glad sunshine the thought filled her mind, that now her mother could be with her, and every day she could make her mother happier and give her some return for her past sorrows! She wrote her a long letter by each post-and could scarcely await her answer. It was a bitter disappointment to her, when it did come; for Gunlaug thanked her, but thought it "better for each to keep by herself." Then the priest promised to write, and when Gunlaug got his letter, she was no longer able to forbear telling the seamen and her other acquaintances that her daughter was about to be a great personage, and wanted her to come and live somewhere with her. At this the thing became a subject of grave consideration in the village, and was discussed in wharves, ships, and kitchens alike. Gunlaug, who till then had never said a word about her daughter, never talked now of anything but "my daughter Petra," nor did any one ever speak to her now of anything else.

But now the time was at hand for Petra's departure, and

Gunlaug had not yet given her a definite answer. This distressed her sorely, though she was somewhat comforted by a solemn promise from both the priest and Signe to come and be with her the first time she appeared on the stage.

The snow was beginning to melt away from the mountains, and the fields were gradually growing green again. Spring, when it comes to the land among the hills, brings with it a life as mighty as the longing for its advent has been. Men's hearts beat quicker, their work grows lighter, and wandering thoughts of the lands that lie beyond the mountains spring up within them. But Petra, spite of her heart's desire, had never loved the place and all around her more than she did now that she was to leave it; it seemed to her as if she had never properly valued it all, or even known its true value till now. She had only a few more days to spend at the parsonage, so she and Signe went around bidding farewell to everybody and everything —lingering with especial fondness on spots that had become dear to them both. Then a rustic brought them a message that Oedegaard was up at Oeygars, and meant to come down to them. Both girls felt somewhat nervous at this, but they gave up their long walks.

When Oedegaard came, he was bright and cheerful, as they had never seen him before. His business in the parish was to start a high school for the children of the people, and he meant to manage it himself until he found a teacher fit to do so; later on he meant to start various other things for the good of the parish: by this means he hoped, as he put it, to pay off something of his father's obligations to it, and old Oedegaard had promised him to come and live with him, as soon as his house was ready. Both the priest and Signe were well pleased indeed to have them for neighbours; but Petra could not help feeling it a

little strange that he should be coming to settle there, just as she was going away.

It was the priest's wish that they all should partake of the Last Supper together the day before Petra's departure. Thus a sort of solemn stillness lay over their last days together, and when they talked, their voices were hushed and low. This feeling lent its effect to everything Petra's thoughts touched on, and her eyes were earnest and her talk serious. All the events of her life were gone through again in their order, as she went balancing up her account with herself; for till now she had ever been looking forward, never back. Now it all came back to her from first to last; once more she heard the dear Spanish airs that had enchanted her so, and in her mind she ran over, one by one, the many strange, uncontrolled fancies of her childhood and youth, and the devious paths they had led her into, much as a person might look again at garments that once fitted him, but which he has now outgrown. If anything escaped her mind for a moment, there was always something close at hand to recall it; for all her thoughts were connected in her mind with some material thing or other, so that, with her, the thing and the thought went ever together; the piano above all teemed with so many associations for her, that it well-nigh overpowered her to see it. She would sit down to it and actually not be able to touch the keys, while, when Signe played, she could scarcely remain in the room. She liked best to be alone; and Oedegaard and Signe, understanding her feelings, kept away from her; but all about her looked at her with mournful affection, and the priest never passed her without stroking her hair.

At last the day had come. It was a damp and misty day; the snow was thawing on the mountains, the grass was showing itself green on the meadows. All four of them kept to their own rooms until it was time for them

to go together to church. There was no one there except themselves, the verger, and a clergyman, for the priest himself was going to partake of the Communion; but, notwithstanding, he preached the sermon, for he had some earnest words to say to the young girl about to leave them. He talked as he was used to talk to them as they sat at dinner at home on a birthday or holy-day. It would soon be made plain, he said, whether the foundation that had been laid during that portion of her life which she was that day closing in prayer to God for grace was deep and secure. No man's life was perfectly true and just till he had found his right life's-work. Hers was the calling as of a preacher, and only by truthful endeavour and worthy living could she hope to produce mighty and enduring results. God often used the unworthy, it was true; and indeed all of us, he said, were in the higher sense unworthy; but God could make use of our strivings and yearnings for goodness. There was *one* great moral goal, and no one might reach it by yearning and thinking alone; each must use his utmost endeavour to approach the Most High. He begged her to come and see them often, for, said he, the main idea of Communion was that of sympathetic faith and mutual help. If ever she erred, she would always find pity and love among them, and if she herself did not see where her error was, they would always be ready with loving advice and aid.

After the holy rite they all four went home together. But the remainder of the day was spent by all in their own rooms, save that in the evening and far into the night Petra and Signe sat long together.

Next morning Petra was to go. At the table the priest took a most tender farewell of her.

"He was quite of Oedegaard's opinion," he said, "in thinking it best for her to begin as she now was, and to begin *alone*. But in the struggle she was now entering on

she would soon find out how helpful it was to know that somewhere there were certain men and women whom she could ever feel sure of. She would see that only to know that they ever remembered her in their prayers would be of no small help to her."

Then, after thus taking leave of Petra, he turned and welcomed Oedegaard.

"To be joined in love for one and the same object," he said, "is ever the most beautiful beginning of love for one another."

No doubt the priest had not a thought in his mind when he uttered this greeting of a certain meaning his words might bear, and which first made Signe and then Petra blush rosy red. Whether Oedegaard blushed or not they knew not, for neither of them dared to look at him.

But when the horses were at the door, and the three friends stood by the young girl, while all the men and women of the place were gathered round the carriage, Petra whispered, as she kissed Signe for the last time:

"I shall soon hear great news from you, I know. God's blessing on it!"

* * * * * *

An hour after she could only see the white peaks that showed where the homestead lay.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CURTAIN RISES.

ONE evening, just before Christmas, all the tickets for the theatre in the metropolis were sold. A new actress, of whom everybody was talking, was to make her first appearance. One of the people—for her mother was a poor fishwife—she had, by the help of some who had perceived her talents, now reached her goal, and she was supposed to have given great promise. Many strange things were being whispered about her among the audience before the curtain rose. She had been, it was said, a shockingly naughty little girl, and had, as soon as she was old enough, got herself engaged to six young men at once, and had kept it up so for six months. She had, they said, been escorted out of her native town by the police, for there had been terrible disturbances because of her; it was a strange thing that the management should permit such a person to appear on the stage. Others declared there was not a word of truth in all this, for she had been brought up ever since she was ten years old in the quiet household of a priest in Bergen. She was a cultivated and charming girl, for they knew her well. No doubt her talents were magnificent, for her beauty was superb.

But there were others sitting there who knew better the

real facts of the case. To begin with, there was the great fish-merchant, whose name was known throughout the land—Yngve Vold. He happened to be in the town on a matter of business; though, to be sure, it was said that his fiery Spanish wife made his house so hot for him that he was forced to travel to cool himself. He had taken the largest box in the theatre all to himself, but had invited his chance acquaintances at dinner in the hotel to come with him and see "something devilish worth seeing." He was in excellent spirits, till suddenly his eye fell on—what! could it be?—there, in that box in another row, and with a whole ship's crew round him—no!—yes!—yes, indeed, it *was* Gunnar Ask! Gunnar Ask, who, by the help of his mother's money, had now become the owner and captain of "The Norwegian Constitution," had happened, as he came out of port, to sail side by side with a ship that bore the name "The Danish Constitution"; and when (as it seemed to Gunnar) the latter tried to get ahead of him, he was quite unable to put up with it; he crowded on all the canvas that he had; the old "Constitution" creaked, and, in the long run, in his efforts to hold her as close up to the wind and as long as possible, he ran her aground on a most ridiculously inconvenient spot. Now he lay in the town against his will, whilst "The Norwegian Constitution" was being patched up. He had met Petra in the town one day, and she had accosted him, and been so gracious and kind to him both then and since, that he not only forgot his grievance against her, but called himself the greatest cod-fish their town had ever exported for ever having been such a fool as to imagine himself fit for such a girl as Petra. He had bought tickets at high prices that day for all his crew; and now he sat there, with the firm intention of treating them after every act; and all his crew—men from Petra's native town, and of good repute in that earthly paradise

her mother's inn—felt Petra's honour to be their own; and as *they* sat there they vowed that their clapping would be such as had never been heard before.

Down in the stalls could be seen the priest's thick, bristly hair. He sat there peacefully, for he had intrusted her case to a Higher One. By his side sat Signe, now Signe Oedegaard. She, with her husband and Petra, had just come back from a three months' trip abroad. There was a look of serene happiness on her face as she sat smiling over at Oedegaard. Between them sat an old woman with snow-white hair that stood up round her brown forehead like a crown. Her head rose above all those around her, and she could be seen from every part of the house. Before long, every opera-glass was turned upon her, as the news spread that this was the young actress's mother. The white-haired dame with the man's name[1] made such a deep impression on the audience that its influence secured their hopeful attention for the daughter. A young nation is full of confident expectation, for it has faith in its own powers; and the sight of the mother touched and roused that faith.

She herself saw nothing and nobody; nor did she trouble much about what was going to take place. All she wanted was to be there and see whether people were kind to her daughter or not.

The time was close at hand. Conversation was dying away in the anxious expectation which was gradually taking possession of all and quieting them.

With a sudden crash of drums, cymbals, and horns, the overture began. Adam Ochlenschlæger's "Axel and Valborg" was the play, and Petra herself had asked for that overture. She sat behind in the side scenes, listening. And in front of the curtain sat as many as the house

[1] Gunlaug is generally a name given to boys: more rarely to girls.

could hold of her countrymen, trembling for her fate, as is ever the case when one expects some great thing of one's own to be brought to the light of day. Each felt as if he himself were to be put to the trial; and at such moments there goes up many a prayer, even from hearts not used to praying.

Gently the overture began to die down: peace fell the harmonies, and they faded as if beneath the ray the sun. The music ceased; deepest stillness reigned, and the curtain rose.

THE END.

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